

Walking In the Spirit



Workbook 3 – Studies 51-75

Spiritual Ministry

25 brief studies plus 33 questions in the workbook section.
Please read all the studies before attempting the workbook questions

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(Donations to support this work are appreciated and can be sent to the above address)

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Table of Contents

How to Use This Workbook	3
A Prayer for Spiritual Cleansing	4
What Is Spiritual Ministry?	7
Spiritual Ministry: Greater Works	9
Spiritual Ministry: Fear & Faith	12
The Initiatives of Heaven Part 1	15
The Initiatives of Heaven Part 2	18
The Initiatives of Heaven Part 3	21
Good Works, Guidance & Spiritual Destiny	24
Rivers of Living Water	27
The Ministry of the Impossible	30
The Essence Is Christ	33
The Ministry of the Word Part 1	36
The Ministry of the Word Part 2	39
The Ministry of the Word Part 3	42
The Ministry of Prayer Part 1	45
The Ministry of Prayer Part 2	49
Praying In Jesus' Name	52
Praying For Your Heart's Desires	55
Praying With Eternity In View	57
Praying For Healing	60
Praying In the Opposite Spirit	63
Ministering Grace in the Spirit	66
Jesus and Our Suffering	69
Why Isn't Everyone Healed?	73
How to Fulfill Your Spiritual Ministry & Destiny	76
Review Questions	79
Appendix – 28 Things God Wants You To Pray For	83

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook can be used for personal study or in a group setting such as in a church or bible class.

It is in black and white, letter-sized format for easy reproduction & distribution.

This manual is designed for anyone who wants to learn about Walking In The Spirit. I have tried to avoid using any highly specialized theological language.

You may readily translate this manual into another language providing that you ask permission by sending me an email at: johned@aibi.ph

PERSONAL STUDY

Read one study per day and you will finish all 25 studies in just under a month. Then go on and do the exercises at the end of the manual. These 33 questions will help reinforce what you have learned.

WEEK-BY-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

Do one or at most two studies per week in your group allowing plenty of time for discussion.

Check out the bible verses that are referenced.

Always ask what people are learning on an individual level from the study e.g. "Mary what was the point that struck you most today?"

Emphasize application to practical daily issues of life.

Each week collect prayer points from group members and close in prayer.

When you have completed the manual go right through all the exercises as a way of tying it all together.

AS A TRAINING COURSE

Send copies of the manual (by post or email) to the students and give them about one month to read the material and do the exercises (see personal study section above). Make yourself available as a mentor during this time.

Then gather all the students together for *at least* three hours, open in worship (30 minutes) and then review the manual and go through the exercise questions together.

Get the students to submit their answers to the exercises to you, then grade them. (There are 33 questions so each answer can be worth 3% with 1% given just for showing up!)

51: A Prayer For Spiritual Cleansing

Before entering into any Christian ministry it is a good idea to remove any grounds for spiritual attack that may be left in your life. Christians cannot be fully possessed by the Devil (because they have the Holy Spirit) but they can be oppressed, hindered and harassed. Such spiritual oppression often stems from things such as involvement in the occult, false teaching, and sexual immorality, or from keeping idols or magic books in the house (Deuteronomy. 7:24-26). Oppression can also come from outside through curses and witch-craft or from within ourselves because we harbor hatred, bitterness, malice and unforgiveness in our hearts (Matthew 18:21-35)

The symptoms of demonic oppression include:

1. Hopelessness, despair, loss of confidence, spiritual anguish and struggle, the constant feeling of accusation or of being 'unclean' in some way.
2. The sense of being cursed or of being the victim of some malicious spiritual force. A feeling that hatred, malice or envy is being directed at you in order to destroy you.
3. An out-of-control thought life, very vivid fantasies and day-dreams, being unable to think straight. Numerous fears.
4. A sense of being 'blocked' or stifled in one's Christian life. A pronounced loss of enthusiasm for spiritual things.
5. Addictions, compulsions, lying, impulsiveness, habitual folly, excessive materialism, being hyper-critical, outbursts of anger, a long line of broken relationships.
6. The feeling of being attacked, strangled or seduced by spirits during one's sleep. Seeing dark shapes. Hearing seducing, accusing or very demanding voices.
7. Unusual, even bizarre accidents and illnesses, constant financial problems, a continual lack of success in life despite one's best efforts.

Acts 19 tells us that Ephesus was full of occult activity such as Jewish exorcists, magicians, idol manufacturers and above them all a gigantic temple to Diana (also known as Artemis). The apostles Paul and John both ministered there and Ephesians and 1 John tell us much about how to combat spiritual oppression. Here are some of the main points:

1. The powers of darkness are real (Ephesians 2:2, 6:12) but Christ has conquered them (Ephesians 1:19-23, 4:8, Colossians. 2:15) and they must submit to His Name (Phil 2:10,11)
2. Jesus Christ has ascended into Heaven (Ephesians 1:19-23, 4:8-10) and Christians have been seated with Him in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6) so we also have spiritual authority (1 Corinthians 6:2,3).

3. If we admit our situation and honestly confess our sins we will be forgiven and the blood of Christ will cleanse us from all sin (1 John 1:7-9)

4. So we see that through Christ we have a right to spiritual cleansing. (Hebrews 9:14)

5. We must renounce the hidden deeds of darkness (Ephesians 5:11-14) including the occult, sexual immorality & covetousness (Ephesians 5:2-5) and all hatred (1 John 2:9-11) and decide to walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:5-7, Ephesians 5:8-10). This is often called removing the ground the enemy has in our lives.

6. After this we should then ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) and put on each piece of the whole armor of God by prayer (Ephesians 6:10-20)

The Prayer

I honestly confess my sins (list them) including any occult involvement of my parents and ancestors (list them) (Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9, 2 Samuel 21:1)

I renounce the Devil and all his works. (this may include destroying occult objects such as magic books & idols) (Acts 19:17-20, Deuteronomy 7:24-26)

I forgive others (list their names) just as Jesus Christ has forgiven me. (Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 6:12-15,)

I claim my spiritual cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ whom I confess to be my Savior and my Lord. (1 John 1:7-9, Hebrews 9:14)

I now give any ground that Satan may have had in my life over to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and I ask for God to fill me with the Holy Spirit and with joy. (Ephesians 5:1-18)

I take up my spiritual authority as one seated in heavenly realms with Christ Jesus and in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth I command Satan and all his demons to depart from me. (Ephesians 2:6, 1:20, Mark 3:15, 16:17,18; Luke 9:1)

I claim that all curses spoken and written against me are broken by the cross of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 3:10-14, Colossians 2:13-15) and that I have all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:3) including the blessings of Abraham (Galatians 3:14,29) for God has out-blessed the curse (Psalm 109:28) and turned it into a blessing (Deuteronomy 23:5)

And I now prayerfully put on each piece of the full armor of God (name each piece see Ephesians 6:10-20) and I will walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:5-7). In Jesus' Name. Amen

Many people have found that it is very helpful to pray for spiritual cleansing twice a day for about two or three weeks. As you pray you will begin to feel 'lighter' spiritually and the heaviness of the spiritual oppression will fade away.

God may bring things to mind that you have to do, such as apologizing to someone or repaying a debt. As you follow these leadings of the Holy Spirit you will find relief.

During this time, you should pray and read the Bible daily, especially Romans 8, Ephesians and 1 John.

Continue going to your local church. It is good to pray this prayer with some help from your pastor or another mature Christian leader.

If you are on any medication (say for anxiety or depression) do **not** go off your medication. Always obey your doctor in this regard.

Remember that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1,2) and that God wants to help you every step of the way. It is the gracious loving power of God that will set you free!

EXTRA: A black and white 3-panel brochure of this prayer is available as a free download at: http://www.newtestamentprayer.com/prayers/prayer_for_spiritual_oppression.pdf This brochure is designed to be easily reproduced and is intended to be freely used for non-profit Gospel ministry (however it may not be sold in any way).

52: What Is Spiritual Ministry?

Spiritual ministry is ministry with spiritual goals which is done under the power, inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit. It is ministry that simply cannot happen unless God shows up. Its basis and its main priority is the Word of God and prayer:

Acts 6:2-4 EMTV *Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not pleasing to us that we should forsake the word of God to serve tables. (3) Therefore, brothers, select seven men from among you, of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint for this need. (4) But we will faithfully engage in prayer and in the ministry of the word."*

The following verses indicate some areas of spiritual ministry that Jesus expected His disciples to be involved in:

Matthew 10:7-8 MKJV *And as you go, proclaim, saying, The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. (8) Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. You have received freely, freely give.*

This is 'scary ministry' because you are totally reliant on God showing you what to do and how to do it and for Him to provide 100% of the results.

Areas of spiritual ministry may include:

1. Proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:8, Luke 10:9)
2. Casting out demons (Matthew 10:8, Acts 8:5-8)
3. Healing the sick (Luke 10:9, Matthew 10:8, 1 Corinthians 12:9, James 5:15)
4. Cleansing lepers (Matthew 10:8) & raising the dead (Acts 9:36-42, 20:7-10)
5. The gift of special visionary faith (1 Corinthians 12:9)
6. The working of mighty miracles (1 Corinthians 12:10)
7. The discerning of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10)
8. Tongues & the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10)
9. Prophecy (Acts 2:17,18, 1 Corinthians 12:10, 1 Corinthians 14:1-40)
10. Words of wisdom and knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8)
11. The ministry of the Word – anointed teaching (Acts 6:2-4, Romans 12:7)
12. The ministry of prayer and intercession (Acts 6:2-4, Colossians 4:12)
13. Shepherding the flock as ones appointed by the Spirit (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4)
14. Providing Scriptural counsel and encouragement (2 Timothy 3:16,17, Rom 12:8)
15. Anointed helping of others in constructive ways (1 Corinthians 12:28)
16. Godly wise leadership administration (Romans 12:8, 1 Corinthians 12:28)
17. Sharing (Romans 12:8, 13; 1 Timothy 6:17-19, Hebrews 13:16, 1 John 3:16-28)
18. Mercy (Romans 12:8, James 1:27)

Some of these gifts such as mercy, helps, sharing, leadership and administration may not (at first) seem to be 'very spiritual' yet they are!! Indeed, they are among the leading causes of burn-out, rage, and compassion fatigue in ministry when they are attempted without the proper calling and anointing. And spiritual leadership and administration are vastly different from that in the business world (just ask any businessman who has tried to transition over to a missions organization or church).

All of these eighteen powerful gift areas require sustained immersion in the Word of God and prayer if they are a) to work at all and b) if they are not to become destructive of either the hearers or the practitioners.

In these studies we are going to have a deep look at spiritual ministry and how it differs from ministry done the world's way, with the world's attitudes and means just as if the church or missions agency was a small, medium or large sized business or bureaucracy and without much real dependence on God the Holy Spirit.

For instance, there is a mile of difference between preaching that has anointing and comes from deep bible study, prayer and dependence on God and preaching that is just theology on display, or preaching that is all theatrics and showmanship. Real spiritual ministry comes from Christ Himself working through that person via the gifts and calling that He has imparted to them.

Spiritual ministry is not automatic and needs to be fanned into flame:

2 Timothy 1:6 MKJV *Therefore I remind you to inflame anew the gift of God, which is in you by the putting on of my hands.*

When the flame goes out a real ministry crisis can result. This is why we need to deeply study the ministry gifts and how they operate and how we can develop them and sustain them so that the body of Christ is fully edified.

I am not meaning to imply that normal day-to-day operational areas such as 'waiting on tables' (Acts 6) or being a parking lot attendant are un-spiritual. They are still very much needed. But they support the work of the spiritual ministries. If no one is getting healed, saved, delivered or instructed in the Truth inside the building then there is not much use parking the cars outside the building!

Jesus was 100% focused on spiritual ministry. He never built a building or set up a publishing house. Even when he fed the five thousand it was with spiritual teaching purposes and faith-building in mind.

And this miracle caused Jesus much trouble when the multitudes then wanted Him to become King, and when Jesus refused they deserted Him in droves so only the twelve were left (John 6).

Spiritual ministry was the focus of Jesus and the apostles and so it should also be the focus of the Church today. But our program mentality will have to move out of the way in the process!

53: Spiritual Ministry: Greater Works

Physical ministry is limited by money, labor supply, building size and so on. However spiritual ministry is only limited by the supply of the Holy Spirit, who is given abundantly to those who believe. Jesus told His apostles they would do 'greater works' because of the spiritual supply that He was going to provide to them after His ascension:

John 14:12-17 MKJV *Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these he shall do, because I go to My Father. (13) And whatever you may ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (15) If you love Me, keep My commandments. (16) And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, so that He may be with you forever, (17) the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him nor know Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you and shall be in you.*

The 'greater works' are done 'because I go to the Father' - that is because Jesus would ascend into the Heavens, take captivity captive and pour out the Holy Spirit and various ministry gifts upon those who believed (Acts 2, Ephesians 4 plus John 14:16,17 above).

At this point after the ascension, Jesus is enthroned in Heaven at the right hand of the majesty on high (Psalm 110, Hebrews 1:1-3) and we can pray to Him as our High Priest (Hebrews 4:12-16) so that if we ask anything in His Name He will do it ((John 14:13,14).

Thus the ascension of Jesus Christ has HUGE implications for spiritual ministry:

1. We have God answering our prayers and requests and moving on our behalf
2. We have immense amounts of spiritual power made available through the Holy Spirit who gives spiritual gifts to men and who will enable us to do 'greater works'.

The only resource that is absolutely essential for effective spiritual ministry is God the Holy Spirit. Only God can cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead, convert sinners, work mighty miracles and so on. Without God none of these things happen.

The fact that our ministry is limited by our financial budget is a terrible lie. Some ministries believe they can 'do nothing' without funding. That is simply not true. None of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 accomplished their ministry goals through a stewardship program or ministry development fund. Moses did not need to raise a million dollars before going to see Pharaoh and Elijah did not have wealth when he stood and confronted the prophets of Baal. Gideon did not have an office and the three young Jews in the fiery furnace did not have an insurance policy. But they all had faith and they all had God on their side.

No amount of gold or silver could have made the lame man at the Gate Beautiful walk again - but God could, and God did.

You can have the biggest buildings and best programs on the planet and it can all be empty human activity. Or you can be like Peter and John and 'have none' and be able to heal the sick and convert 3000 people on one day. The critical element in ministry is not funding, it is the supply of the Holy Spirit! (Now if God has given you abundant funds and a big building, that is great, but do not rely on that rather rely on God!)

The glory gets into our soul through prayer, faith and believing the word of God. We need more anointing, more faith, and more reliance on God. When we have faith then God turns up and we see miracles and conversions. Without faith all we have left is ecclesiastical machinery.

Galatians 3:1-5 MKJV *O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you not to obey the truth, to whom before your eyes Jesus Christ was written among you crucified? (2) This only I would learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing of faith? (3) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, do you now perfect yourself in the flesh? (4) Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it is even in vain? (5) Then He supplying the Spirit to you and working powerful works in you, is it by works of the law, or by hearing of faith?*

We are very easily persuaded that this is not so. Strong personalities tell us that we can begin in the Spirit – but that is only a beginning, even a fine beginning, but after that we will require programs, buildings and a bureaucracy if our ministry is to 'be credible, have status, line up with the latest business practices' and so on. And of course 'to be effective' we will need the latest church consultants, expensive development programs, websites and a big billboard down on Main Street.

Jesus, the apostles and the heroes of faith were very effective and they had few if any of those things. Buildings are incidentals, not essentials. You can be effective preaching in the fields to coal-miners (John Wesley was). And Martin Luther began the Reformation as a humble monk with few possessions of his own. Anointing with the Holy Spirit is the key ingredient for ministry effectiveness. All the other things are mere props and tools to be used along the way.

The supply of the Holy Spirit is so vast and so complete that we are only perhaps glimpsing the very fringes of it. The Holy Spirit can create a mighty apostolic ministry out of the most poverty-stricken circumstances. We see people in India and China doing great works for God on \$150 a month, riding bicycles, walking barefoot, living simply. And the ministry of the apostle Paul was not limited when he was destitute:

1 Corinthians 4:9-13 MKJV *(9) For I think that God has set forth us last, the apostles, as it were appointed to death; for we have become a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men. (10) We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are honorable, but we are despised. (11) Even until this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling place. (12) And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; (13) being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.*

Now the point of all this is not to shame or to accuse anyone but rather to point out where the true source of our power lies and where our confidence and our hope should be. We can do greater works, and we can do them no matter what our financial circumstances are – because of what Christ has done for us through His death, His resurrection and His ascension into Heaven to reign at the right hand of God on High.

There are no fixed limits to your ministry. Money cannot limit your ministry. Being in prison cannot limit your ministry (e.g. Paul's epistles). And being thrown into a fiery furnace or being nailed to a Cross cannot limit your ministry. And geography cannot limit it - John the Baptist preached in the remote Judean wilderness yet he was heard. If God is with you no man or circumstance or demon can be against you!

Romans 8:31-39 MKJV *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) Truly He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ... (35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep of slaughter." (37) But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

God wants to do 'greater works' through you as you believe in Him. God wants to increase His glory through you. God wants to touch the hearts of men and women through you. But you must believe. You must call on God for the anointing. You must know for certain that without Jesus 'you can do nothing' (John 15:5) but in Him, and with the anointing, you can 'bear much fruit' (John 15:1-8).

Do not think, even for a single second, that you can accomplish any spiritual ministry of any sort by your own power and piety – you simply cannot (Acts 3:12). As you become utterly dependent on God, as you abide in the vine, as you exercise faith, as you believe, then the Holy Spirit will abundantly come upon you and move in you and move through you to the nations.

Ephesians 3:20-21 MKJV *Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, (21) to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever. Amen.*

54: Spiritual Ministry: Fear & Faith

John 14:12-13 MKJV *Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these he shall do, because I go to My Father. (13) And whatever you may ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

We have seen that spiritual ministry requires God the Holy Spirit to show up. For many people that is rather frightening. What if God does not show up? What if people are not healed? What if the demon is not cast out and what if the Spirit-led worship is a disaster? There is a fear of appearing foolish. Even a fear of diminishing “God’s glory” through such public forms of “failure”. We think: “O my goodness what will we do if God does not show up on Sunday?”

So from this small unbelieving question, from this lack of faith we start substituting for the Holy Spirit. Instead of proclaiming the Kingdom we proclaim the church or the denomination, instead of preaching the Word we preach human reason, instead of Spirit-led worship we have professional orchestrated worship programs. Gradually every function of the Holy Spirit is replaced with a “program” until even sanctification is a “counseling program”. (Now outside the Church, there is nothing wrong with counseling, but when it is viewed almost as a substitute for actual grace, then it becomes wrong).

Now in order to do all this frantic substitute activity that 'keeps face', that shows that God is real - even though we secretly believe he would never show up on Sunday; we need facilities, committees, websites, development programs etc. Over time this results in an empty organization, an institution, that tries to 'protect God'. Its hollow. It is full of secret unbelief. And its scared half to death of ever really being asked to deal with the awesome and the Holy. James deals with this kind of doubt in his epistle:

James 1:6-7 MKJV *But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing. For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. (7) For do not let that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord;*

Our doubt about God turning up becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because the person who doubts 'receives nothing from the Lord'. So we see that this series of 'little fears' eventually has catastrophic consequences for the spiritual life and for the proclamation of the gospel. So what can we do about it? How can we move from fear to faith?

Let’s go back to John 14:12 above. This verse is a promise, straight from the mouth of Jesus, that God will turn up in amazing ways if we just truly believe on Him. Indeed, we will see the incredible miracles of Jesus, plus even greater works (which are left undefined).

Whatever else it means, it means that the really big stuff was not going to end with Jesus, or even with the apostles, but would flow from: *he who believes on Me* – which is from anyone who has faith. Let’s look a bit more at the phrase “he who believes on Me”:

John 7:37-39 MKJV *And in the last day of the great feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. (38) He who believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (39) (But He spoke this about the Spirit, which they who believed on Him should receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.)*

So we see that faith unlocks the 'rivers of living water' – torrents of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit flowing from our innermost being is the power behind all true spiritual ministry. This again is a promise from the lips of Jesus.

We also find that 'he who believes': is saved (Mark 16:16), does not come into condemnation (John 3:18,5:24), has everlasting life (John 3:36,5:24,6:47), has passed from death to life (John 5:24), shall never hunger or thirst (John 6:35), will be resurrected (John 11:25,26), believes in Him who sent Jesus (John 12:44), will not be ashamed (1 Peter 2:6), has overcome the world (1 John 5:5) and has the witness in himself (1 John 5:10). Believing drives the entire spiritual life from start to finish!

God wants us to move beyond spiritual timidity to have power, love and a sound mind:

2 Timothy 1:6-7 MKJV *Therefore I remind you to inflame anew the gift of God, which is in you by the putting on of my hands. (7) For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

Timothy had let his fears get in the way of his faith and his gifting. Paul was urging him to go on, to believe, to be a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Fear sometimes masquerades as common sense, respectability and many other things. Following the Holy Spirit seems risky and even foolhardy (which may be the reason Paul called himself a 'fool for Christ's sake'). Yet it is those who are led by the Spirit who are the sons of God (Romans 8:14).

Elijah is a good example of bold spiritual ministry:

James 5:16-18 MKJV ... *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous one avails much. (17) Elijah was a man of like passion as we are. And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for the time of three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to sprout.*

Elijah fully expected God to answer his prayers because he was being led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not lead you to pray for things that God does not want to do!

Bold spiritual ministry comes about once we realize that the Holy Spirit is leading us and that God is with us in that endeavor (which is why the first 50 studies were about being led by the Spirit and communicating with God). Once we understand the 'initiatives of heaven' we can step out and be bold and know, for sure, that God is going to be there because it was His idea in the very first place!

Jesus gives us some tantalizingly brief glimpses into this process in His life and ministry:

John 5:19-20 MKJV *Then Jesus answered and said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do. For whatever things He does, these also the Son does likewise. (20) For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all the things that He Himself does. And He will show Him greater works than these, so that you may marvel.*

John 5:30 MKJV *I can do nothing of My own self. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who has sent Me.*

John 8:38 MKJV *I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you, then, do what you have seen with your father (the Devil).*

John 12:49-50 MKJV *For I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say, and what I should speak. (50) And I know that His command is life everlasting. Therefore whatever I speak, even as the Father said to Me, so I speak.*

John 13:3-4 MKJV *Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and went to God, (4) He rose up from supper and laid aside His garments. And He took a towel and girded Himself.*

John 14:31 MKJV *But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father has given Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go away from here.*

So we see that Jesus saw what the Father was doing and did likewise (John 5:19), sought only the Father's will not His own will (John 5:30), spoke what He saw with the Father, indeed God commanded Jesus as to what to say and what to speak (John 8:38, 12:49,50), had God communicate to Him his identity and His destiny yet was humble about it (John 13:3,4) and fully followed the commandments that He received from the Father, even going to the Cross (John 14:31).

Now of course we are not Jesus Christ, but we are called to be in His image and to do His works, and we are to be led by the Spirit and to follow God's will and God's commandments in all things. In Acts we see that the apostles took this leading of the Holy Spirit very seriously and that it was part of the dynamic life of the early Christian Church.

So how do we go from fear to faith? First we must put aside our doubts, pray to God, listen to God and then act on what we hear. We must believe that God is honorable and will back up His words and His commandments with His power.

Yes, this is risky and yes, it may take some practice, but is far better than receiving nothing from the Lord. God WILL turn up. He promises to turn up and there are thousands of testimonies about Him turning up for those who believe.

55: The Initiatives of Heaven - 1

The phrase 'the initiatives of Heaven' is one I have borrowed from Dennis Walker of Dunamis ARC ministry in Las Vegas, Nevada. It is a way of describing the reality that spiritual ministry proceeds from the heavenly realms and is 100% God's initiative not ours. Our task is to cooperate with God in the work of the ministry.

Almost by definition, God takes the initiative in spiritual ministry. The Holy Spirit is in charge before, during, and after the ministry session. It is not up to us to make the plans or to take the initiative. It is up to us to wait on God in prayer to see what He wants us to do – then move forward in obedience to that prompting. We see this principle operating in Paul's ministry in Acts 16:

Acts 16:6-10 MKJV *And coming through the Phrygian and the Galatian region; and by the Holy Spirit being forbidden to speak the Word in Asia; (7) having come to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia. But the Spirit did not allow them. (8) Then passing by Mysia, they came down into Troas. (9) And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A certain man of Macedonia stood, begging him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us! (10) And after he saw the vision, we immediately tried to go into Macedonia, gathering that the Lord had called us in order to preach the gospel to them.*

The Holy Spirit stopped them ministering in Asia at that point (they would do so later on) and blocked entry in Bithynia, until at Troas Paul got the night vision about the Macedonian Call. This is an initiative of Heaven – God has made the ministry plan and He calls Paul and Silas to join in it.

We see similar examples with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), Ananias being sent to heal the blind Saul / Paul (Acts 9), Peter going to Cornelius' house (Acts 10), Agabus' warning about the famine and the church response (Acts 11:28ff), and Peter escaping from prison (Acts 12) and so on. In fact the ministries of the apostles and disciples seem to be entirely Spirit-led. They let God do the planning according to His wisdom and then they simply joined in with what God was doing.

They developed their ministry gifts and learned the Scriptures and even has special callings given by God (such as Paul's 'to preach the gospel to the Gentiles'). But they did not snatch up the reins and try to steer their ministries. They became co-participants with God in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Even the most gifted individual should seek the Spirit's direction as to the specifics of implementing God's calling, such as where to preach and when to travel and even what to say to certain individuals.

The initiatives of Heaven may be things that we would never have thought of, and even may be things quite outside our comfort zone such as Jonah being sent to Nineveh or Ananias being sent to pray for Saul. But whatever God's plan is – it is good!

Now the trouble is that we tend to doubt God at the critical moment. When we feel that nudge in our spirit to say something to an important person we are overcome with shyness, or when we feel led to go to a certain city for ministry we think of the cost.

There is a certain boldness that is required if we are to fully cooperate with God. Satan operates via fear so to overcome these spiritual attacks we must be bold. Satan also operates on us through doubt, skepticism, fear of social disapproval, and poor teaching on the nature of Christian ministry. We must not give in to such things!

Thus following the initiatives of Heaven requires prayerfulness, boldness, zeal and ethical integrity as we minister in the Name of Jesus Christ. We are to be constantly listening to God for the 'next step' and fine-tuning our plans in accordance with His prompting.

Small acts of obedience can have big consequences. Once when I was getting ready for a Christian camp the Holy Spirit said 'pack that black jumper' (a jumper in Australia = a sweater in USA), it was thin, old and ragged and was one I generally only used for fishing. But I put it in my duffel bag and went to camp.

I wore it on the first evening of camp as it was a bit chilly and I found out that black as "in" that year. I was soon adopted as leader by a group of five highly extroverted teenage girls who were not yet believers. They spiked my hair in gel, hung out with me, and got gloriously saved. They all went to Bray Park High so we started a Scripture Union bible club at that school that eventually had 40 members in it.

God's very simple leading led to a whole chain of positive events that resulted in glory being given to God.

Some people deny that such prompting has any place in the Christian life of modern believers. A leading proponent of this is Gary Friesen whose book "Decision-Making In The Will of God" has been a best-seller for many years. Dr. Friesen's book is a reaction against legalism, against the 'dot' theory where people could 'miss God's will for their life' by messing up a small decision. However, he has gone overboard and thrown out all spiritual impressions whatsoever and all Holy Spirit guidance along the way. He has 'thrown the baby out with the bathwater'. God does communicate His will to us, personally, and that is a big part of the joy of the Christian life.

However, this does raise a question – what do we do when there is no specific guidance?

There is a place for common sense in routine matters. A friend of mine waited four months to get her car fixed because she was praying for a 'sign' as to which mechanic to use. The car was totally wrecked by the time the four months was up.

You don't need Holy Spirit guidance on which shoe to put on first or on whether you should pay the electricity bill. These things are the simple routines of life that God expects us to take care of. God will speak when He wishes to speak about something special.

So we should not deny the value of the leading of the Holy Spirit and retreat to our own wisdom and intelligence, nor should we become passive and dependent and expect Holy Spirit guidance for every tiny detail of our lives.

One way to think of this is to see yourself as a soldier under orders. God is the General, the Master Planner. He decides who goes where and what the overall strategy will be. Sometimes you will get special orders and you should obey them. Other times you will just be at your guard-post doing routine duties faithfully and that is fine as well. If there is action you will respond

according to your training first and listen carefully for any special directions on the radio. When orders come we are to be bold and courageous to promptly carry out the will of the Commander.

Now spiritual ministry is a quite different matter from having your car fixed or packing for camp. Spiritual ministry is initiated by God, empowered by God and directed by God. You really CANNOT do effective spiritual ministry unless you are totally surrendered to His guidance. Let's see what Jesus said about His own spiritual ministry:

John 5:19-20 MKJV *Then Jesus answered and said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do. For whatever things He does, these also the Son does likewise. (20) For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all the things that He Himself does...*

John 5:30 MKJV *I can do nothing of My own self. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who has sent Me.*

When it came to ministry Jesus did nothing out of his own initiative, nothing out of His self, nothing from His own judgment and nothing from His own will. Now Jesus had a perfect judgment and will and His thoughts were pure. If anyone could have done His own ministry planning it should have been the Lord! However, Jesus sought the will of the Father. He wanted His ministry direction to come from Heaven above.

If Jesus sought out the initiatives of heaven – how much more should you and I!

56: The Initiatives of Heaven - Part 2

God creates opportunities for us to minister and then expects us to seize them. On the other hand, God also expects us to be systematic – such as when Jesus asked his disciples to go two by two throughout the villages of Israel, or when Paul returned to the new churches to see how they were going and to strengthen them. Yet as we go about our systematic daily ministry we should also be prepared for God's surprises, God's divine appointments.

There is this dynamic balance between spontaneity and order. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 14 there is much teaching on prophecy and tongues and worship but also the admonition that God is a God of order and of peace, and not of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Let's take this down to the level of preparing a weekly sermon. I always advocate having a 12 month preaching plan (or even longer) so that both the pastor and the church and the worship team all have a good idea of what to expect. For instance, you might pray over what to teach for that year and decide to preach on the gospel of John chapters 1-11 for 22 weeks (half a chapter per week) and then add in Mother's Day, Father's Day and a few other occasions, some missions sermons, some devotional material from the Old Testament (say 6 Psalms) and twelve weeks the book of Ephesians (again half a chapter per week).

Now is this excluding God? Not at all – as long as you remain sensitive to His prompting. Preaching God's word faithfully and systematically blesses His people and honors His name. Another thing I recommend is that pastors write out their sermons word for word. This assists with having a well-structured sermon and tends to prevent waffling, repetition and poor logic. After it has been written out then put the main points into PowerPoint and preach from that as the Spirit leads (don't just read the sermon). The fully written out sermon can then be posted to the church website for the whole world to read and to be blessed by, even many years later.

Now the Holy Spirit can create many ministry opportunities out of this systematic presentation and work. The Holy Spirit may use that well-prepared sermon to convict people, or to lead someone to Christ, or to create a counseling opportunity later that week, or an Internet ministry opportunity via email. Thus there is no inherent conflict between 'flowing in the Spirit' and being systematic, orderly and properly prepared in ministry.

There is a dynamic balance between the initiatives of Heaven and your responsibility to be a faithful steward of the grace of God, who accurately divides the Word of God. God may suddenly send you to Nigeria, but when you arrive, you must preach the truth!

On the other hand, order without inspiration can become suffocating. If we are not receptive to the initiatives of Heaven, we can miss major ministry opportunities and fail to reap in the more fruitful fields of Harvest. God always wants to send us into areas of maximum effectiveness. He does not want anyone sitting around, going nowhere with a stale, unproductive ministry:

Matthew 10:11-15 ISV *"Whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you leave. (12) As you enter the house, greet it. (13) If the house is receptive, let your blessing of peace come on it. But if it isn't receptive, let your blessing of peace return to you. (14) If no one welcomes you or listens to your words, as you leave that house or town, shake its*

dust off your feet. (15) Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town!"

Since the Harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few (Matthew 9:37), it makes sense that God would want His laborers where they can do the most good! It is also very evident that many of God's servants are NOT where they should be at all.

Huge harvest fields have hardly anyone ministering in them! And some areas are so over-populated with workers that Christians complain that there are simply no opportunities for ministry!

It seems to me that the Church is listening to its own voice instead of God's voice and to its own organizational priorities rather than God's Harvest priorities! We need to unplug ourselves from our agendas and start listening to God's Agenda! When God's people catch the initiatives of Heaven a far greater percentage of Christians will be in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time, and getting the right results.

We just don't see the world the way God does. We cannot see into human hearts and know which ones are ripe and ready for salvation. And we do not know what is about to happen with nations and how a door for the gospel that is now open, may soon be closed, unless we act very quickly. Our judgment is so far from optimal that we simply should not be running the show. Even if we had perfect missions statistics and cultural analysis we would be far short of the mark. Ministry MUST be God-directed. Without the leading of the Holy Spirit we will simply be fruitless and hopeless ministers of the gospel seeing few saved and even less transformed and matured in Christ.

So the question then becomes: "How do we end up in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time, and getting the right results?"

Step One is to give up your own initiative, will and judgment just as Jesus gave up His own initiative, will and judgment in deference to the Father (John 5:30, 8:38, 12:49,50)

Step Two is to actively watch and listen to the Father using your spiritual senses such as your spiritual eyes and ears (above verses plus Hebrews 5:14) which are part of your conscience. Check what you receive against Scripture and general wisdom.

Step Three is, as soon as you are sure it's the Lord, then act on the leading.

Let's see how this applied to the case of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:

Acts 8:26-29 MKJV *And the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south, on the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is a deserted place. (27) And he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem to worship, (28) was returning. And sitting in his chariot he read Isaiah the prophet. (29) Then the Spirit said to Philip, Go near and join yourself to this chariot.*

A great revival in Samaria had just concluded with many saved, delivered, baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. The apostles were heading back to Jerusalem when an angel tapped Philip

on the shoulder and told him to go to a deserted area. In 'the natural' this was a rather bizarre command, but Philip gave up his own will, judgment and initiative and obeyed the angel.

Philip arrives to find a chariot of an important Ethiopian official and the Holy Spirit then prompts Philip to join the chariot. Now given that this important financial official probably had numerous bodyguards there may have been some risk in this! But Philip overcame any shyness and trepidation and obeyed the Spirit. At this point the Ethiopian eunuch asks a question about Isaiah 53 and Philip's well prepared ministry skills take over and he leads the eunuch to Christ, eventually baptizing him in water. The ministry in the deserted place being completed the Spirit moves Philip to more fruitful areas:

Acts 8:39-40 MKJV *And when they had come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more. And he went on his way rejoicing. (40) But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached the gospel in all the cities until he came to Caesarea.*

This simple witness to a single individual eventually led to the founding of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church! Spirit-led obedience is like the loaves and the fishes – it seems to have blessing, multiplication and power built right into it.

Philip:

- a) Gave up his own will and understanding of the situation*
- b) Followed clear leadings from God without hesitation*
- c) Ministered faithfully and biblically and*
- d) Ended up being in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time, and getting the right results.*

57: The Initiatives of Heaven - 3

Yesterday we saw that the initiatives of Heaven are the way that God guides us so that we end up being in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time, and getting the right results.

By being sensitive to God's guidance through our conscience and our spiritual senses we become attuned to God's immediate agenda in that present moment. This helps us to know what to do and how to do it.

Just to clarify, there are three types of guidance that I see in Scripture and they all work together for the glory of God:

- a) Knowledge of the Scriptures is God's macro-guidance and gives us wisdom that we can apply in many different situations. It is Scripture that equips the man of God to minister effectively (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Scripture is primary and authoritative.
- b) A sense of gifting and calling such as "I am called to be an apostle to the Gentiles" is God's medium range guidance. This kind of guidance forms our identity, training, skill sets and outlook. It tells us who we are, and what we can do in the body of Christ and gives us our sense of "role".
- c) The initiatives of Heaven are God's 'micro-guidance' and position us correctly within our role and circumstances so that we end up being in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time, and getting the right results

Let's apply this to the case we saw yesterday of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

1. Philip had a calling as an evangelist that he was fulfilling in Samaria.
2. The initiatives of Heaven repositioned Philip so that he was taken out of Samaria and sent to Gaza – this was accomplished via an angel telling him to go to Gaza and the Holy Spirit telling him to join the chariot. This resulted in Philip being in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time.
3. The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53 so Philip used his equipping and knowledge of the Scriptures to be an effective minister of grace who rightly divided the Word of God – and thus led the eunuch to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

So Philip had to be a) moving in his calling and b) equipped with the Scriptures so that he could be c) repositioned by God's micro-guidance into a highly strategic and effective situation. There are many faithful men and women of God who are well-equipped with Bible training and who are definitely called and moving in their calling but who are seeing very little fruit in their ministry. They need God's micro-guidance!

God's micro-guidance, which we are calling the initiatives of Heaven, are daily downloads of God's priorities for action. They are short-term and immediate and the apostles acted on them pretty much straight away (except for Peter who let the men from Cornelius stay overnight before heading out with them possibly because they needed the rest – Acts 10:23).

Again let's look at some incidents in Acts chapter 5:

Acts 5:15-21 MKJV *So as to carry out the sick into the streets and place them on cots and mattresses, so that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. (16) And also a multitude came from the cities around Jerusalem, bringing sick ones, and those being tormented by unclean spirits, who were all healed. (17) And rising up, the high priest, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) were filled with anger, (18) And laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the public custody. (19) But the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors by night and brought them out, and said, (20) Go! Stand and speak all the words of this Life to the people in the temple. (21) And hearing, they went into the temple about dawn, and taught...*

Peter and the apostles are having a mighty healing ministry and this enrages the envious High Priest who then throws the apostles in prison. An angel brings them out by night and says to them: *Go! Stand and speak all the words of this Life to the people in the temple.* They obeyed the angel's instructions immediately. And so at dawn they went right back into the territory of the High Priest (the Temple) and preached and taught the gospel.

This instruction was for all the apostles, on that day, in order for them to bear witness to Christ. Later they would travel all over the Roman Empire, but on this day they were to be in the Temple teaching. This was the right place at the right time for the purposes of the Kingdom of God. However, this 'Temple preaching' was not to be the pattern for all time. It was an immediate instruction for 'that hour' and was understood as such. Later they would preach in synagogues and marketplaces and houses and on desert roads.

The initiatives of Heaven are God's daily guidance, His tactical operations to defeat the enemy of our souls. God might wake you up in the middle of the night to pray for someone – don't go back to sleep! Obey the prompting and pray through to victory! God might prompt you to warn a co-worker about an inappropriate relationship that could wreck her marriage – speak up before it is too late!

The initiatives of Heaven are not complex. They are generally just a few words, a sentence or a short paragraph at most such as: "Join the Chariot" "Go, stand and speak ..." etc. They are God's quick touch on our life telling us to do (or in some cases not to do) a certain thing.

Not obeying a prompting can be costly. Rick Renner tells the story of his time in Moscow when he was supposed to attend a farewell function but felt very strongly that the Spirit was telling him to stay in his hotel room. He went to the function but returned after a while due to the urgency of the feeling, only to find the room trashed and burgled at a large loss to themselves and the ministry. He wrote saying that if he had obeyed the nudge from God then this would not have occurred.

I have had experiences where not listening to a prompt about consuming certain food has made me ill, and even one where I was burgled under very similar circumstances!

If we want to be a blessing to others, avoid danger and have optimal effectiveness in ministry we need to be incredibly sensitive and obedient to these leadings of the Holy Spirit.

Now this leads to the question: What about those goofy people who claim to be led by the Spirit but just seem to be rather irresponsible and self-centered individuals? Are you asking us to be like them?

No, of course not. People take advantage of every teaching of Scripture and some claim a new leading from God every time life gets difficult. Just because a few people abuse this doctrine or make it very legalistic, it does not mean that we should throw it out altogether!

God leads! God guides! And God speaks to his children about many aspects of their lives! In the next study we will look at how to hear the initiatives of Heaven for our own life and ministry.

58: Good Works, Guidance & Spiritual Destiny

As God's workmanship we are created both to be good and to do good. We are saved by faith through grace, for a good purpose. And not just for any old good purpose, but for certain good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to do:

Ephesians 2:8-10 MKJV *For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.*

Psalms 139:16 ASV *Thine eyes did see mine unformed substance; And in thy book they were all written, Even the days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was none of them.*

God has created our days and He has also created the good works that we are supposed to fill our days with. He brings to us a discouraged person so that we can encourage them, or a penitent sinner so that we can lead them to Christ, or an eager bible student so that we can teach them or a sick person so that we can heal them or a small child so that we can love her or a youth so we can be a role model for him. Our day to day interactions at work, at home and in the ministry bring us hundreds of opportunities to glorify God.

Now, as I see it there are three main ways that God guides us into good works:

1. Through circumstances placed right in front of us by God which we in turn respond to out of our Christian character and conscience. For instance, God sends us a hungry person so we just automatically feed them or a lonely person so we automatically befriend them. This is just so much a part of us that we hardly notice it:

Matthew 25:34-40 MKJV *Then the King shall say to those on His right hand, Come, blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (35) For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; (36) I was naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me. (37) Then the righteous shall answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see You hungry, and fed You? Or thirsty, and gave You drink? (38) When did we see You a stranger, and took You in? Or naked, and clothed You? (39) Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and came to You? (40) And the King shall answer and say to them, Truly I say to you, Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you have done it to Me.*

This compassion flows from the normal agape love lifestyle of the Spirit-filled Christian:

1 John 3:16-20 ISV *This is how we have come to know love: Christ gave his life for us. We, too, ought to give our lives for our brothers. (17) Whoever has earthly possessions and notices a brother in need and yet withholds his compassion from him, how can the love of God remain in him? (18) Little children, we must stop loving in word and in tongue, but instead love in action and in truth. (19) And this is how we will know that we belong to the truth and how we will be able to establish our hearts in his presence. (20) If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.*

2. We also guided into good works as a result of our **calling in Christ**. These good works are performed in a deliberate and intentional fashion through the normal daily functioning of our special spiritual gift e.g. pastoring, evangelism or teaching:

2 Timothy 4:2-5 MKJV *preach the Word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. But you watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fully carry out your ministry.*

Timothy's ministry flowed not so much out of the reflex actions of conscience as from the struggle to fulfill his calling in Christ. Timothy was guided by his calling as to what to do each day. For instance, Timothy was to do the work of an evangelist and preach the word 'in-season and out-of-season' without regard as to whether it seemed to be effective at the time.

3. Finally we receive guidance concerning good works as a result of **communication** from God. These are the initiatives of Heaven we have been speaking about. These are the times when the Holy Spirit takes charge so that we are in the right place at the right time, doing the right things, with the right people and getting the right results. This kind of guidance sometimes takes us into new or difficult or unusual territory. A biblical example would be Jonah preaching to Nineveh or Ananias going to pray for Saul so that the church persecutor could see and be filled with the Holy Spirit. These were not immediately obvious things for either of them to do and so required special communication from God. God's special communication, the 'initiatives of heaven' , can also be used to properly direct how a ministry calling is to be carried out:

Acts 16:9-10 MKJV *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A certain man of Macedonia stood, begging him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us! (10) And after he saw the vision, we immediately tried to go into Macedonia, gathering that the Lord had called us in order to preach the gospel to them.*

All three of the above ways of being guided into doing good works are necessary. We are to be full of agape love and of good character and conscience, we are to work diligently at our calling as faithful stewards of the grace of God and we are to hear God's special communication directing us into specific good works.

If we fail to listen to God's guidance through these means, then we will fail to do the good works God has called us to and we will miss our spiritual destiny. If instead of agape love, we are full of selfishness - then we will not do many good works. If we are lazy in our ministry calling, then we will miss great opportunities to glorify God. And if we are not listening to the initiatives of Heaven then we will miss the 'tactical' opportunities.

If one person fails to do the good works that they have been assigned to do, then in turn that can, and often does, affect others. Hudson Taylor told the story of how he had twenty struggling mission stations (I think they were on the China / Tibet border). When he went back to England he recruited twenty churches and prayer bands, one for each of the mission stations. There were breakthroughs in nineteen of the mission stations but one remained obstinately difficult and 'heartbreak territory' for those ministering there. He was greatly puzzled by this and on his next trip back to England he checked with the churches who had pledged to pray for the mission stations. Nineteen had prayed faithfully, but one had not done so, and that one was the one assigned to the station that saw no spiritual breakthrough. Many other stories can be told like this. When we are selfish, lazy or not listening for the Spirit's voice it can end up affecting large portions of the body of Christ.

You have a spiritual destiny. You have good works that God has foreordained that you should walk in, and your days were planned out even before you were born. Are you going to enter into God's plan for your life? Or are you going to obstinately refuse it?

To enter into God's plan, you must develop a good character that is full of agape love, and you must become faithful, courageous, diligent and strong in your God-given calling, and you must listen to the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit directing you at the tactical level about what to say and what to do.

Ephesians 3:20-21 MKJV *Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, (21) to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever. Amen.*

59: Rivers of Living Water

Spiritual ministry depends on the supply of the Spirit. In times of great faith and revival spiritual ministry flourishes. In times of unbelief and apostasy spiritual ministry is almost unbearably difficult.

The first, and often the most difficult step is to believe that God wants to FREELY give us an abundant supply of the Holy Spirit:

Luke 11:13 MKJV *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*

God gives the Spirit as a Father gives food to a child, that is freely, for the asking. The child asks for bread or an egg and the Father gives the appropriate food. The Spirit is given 'to those who ask Him'. And we are to ask as needy children ask when they are hungry; humbly, yet insistently – trusting in the goodness of our Father.

John 3:34 MKJV *For He whom God has sent speaks the Words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.*

God is infinite and gracious and He has no need to be stingy, nor does He even have any desire to be stingy. In fact, He is a God of abundant goodness (John 10:10). He doesn't give His gifts drop by drop, cautiously watching to see if everyone 'has just the right amount' as if it is a pie that has to be carefully cut into the right sized pieces. God does not have to give the Spirit out in such small careful doses. His supply is abundant. He will graciously give a mighty empowering of the Spirit to all who ask for it.

John 4:10-14 MKJV *Jesus answered and said to her, If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give Me to drink, you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water. (11) The woman said to Him, Sir, you have no vessel, and the well is deep. From where then do you have that living water? (12) Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his children and his cattle? (13) Jesus answered and said to her, Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again, (14) but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

Jesus promised the living water of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritan woman as a completely gracious act that had no regard for her nationality, her broken lifestyle or her theological misunderstandings. And Jesus told her that if she drank at His well it would not be a static well but a spring, an abundant supply, continuously springing up into everlasting life. There was no sense of her having to earn such a great blessing.

John 7:37-39 MKJV *And in the last day of the great feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. (38) He who believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (39) (But He spoke this about the Spirit, which they who believed on Him should receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.)*

During the great feast the priest would fill a golden pitcher with water from the Fountain of Siloam, and bring it back to the temple amid music and joyful shouts. Advancing to the altar of burnt-offering, at the cry of the people, "Lift up thy hand!" he would empty the pitcher toward the west, and toward the east a cup of wine, while the people chanted, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

Jesus stands up on the last day of the Feast, after this has happened seven times on previous days and declares: *If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. (38) He who believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."* Jesus is clearly referring to the water-pouring ceremony described above and John interprets it as reference to the Holy Spirit. The implications are that:

- a) All who believe will have an abundant supply of the Holy Spirit
- b) The 'rivers' of Christ are immeasurably greater than the golden pitchers of Judaism
- c) We will joyfully draw water from the wells of salvation that are in Christ.

This abundant supply of the Holy spirit comes to *'those who believe'* and this is backed up by Galatians which tells us that we receive the promise of the Spirit through faith and not through any religious works 'of the Law':

Galatians 3:2, 5 MKJV *This only I would learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing of faith? ... (5) Then He supplying the Spirit to you and working powerful works in you, is it by works of the law, or by hearing of faith?*

Galatians 3:14 MKJV *so that the blessing of Abraham might be to the nations in Jesus Christ, and that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Anyone who thirsts can take of the water of life freely:

Isaiah 55:1 MKJV *Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat. Yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

Revelation 21:6 MKJV *And He said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who thirsts I will give of the fountain of the Water of Life freely.*

Revelation 22:17 MKJV *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let the one hearing say, Come! And let the one who is thirsty come. And he willing, let him take of the Water of Life freely.*

So we see that the Holy Spirit is supplied freely, abundantly and without restriction to those who believe, who ask as a little child, and who thirst for the Living Water of God.

You don't need any money, or to be of a certain nationality or to have your life together.

God freely and graciously supplies the Holy Spirit through faith to the Gentiles, to the Samaritan woman, to the spiritually thirsty and so on. It is the poor in spirit that inherit the Kingdom of God. There is no reason to doubt or to hold back.

God wants all Christians to flow mightily in the Spirit and that includes you.

Satan tries to convince us that we do not deserve an abundant supply of the Holy Spirit, but God tells us that our sins are forgiven and that His supply is by grace alone. Another lie is that the supply of the Holy Spirit is reserved for special people such as ministers and missionaries. But the Scriptures tell us that God supplies to all as a heavenly father, giving freely to him who asks and him who believes. A third lie is that the mighty works of the Holy Spirit are for another time or for another generation, but Peter refutes this on the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:38-39 MKJV *Then Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (39) For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

The Holy Spirit is the power behind all truly spiritual ministry and He is given freely to those who thirst and who believe and who come to God asking to be filled with the Holy Ghost each day:

Ephesians 5:18-20 MKJV *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, (19) speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; (20) always giving thanks for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Enjoy God! Rejoice in Jesus! Ask for the full abundance of the Holy Spirit!

60: The Ministry Of The Impossible!

All spiritual ministry is impossible to the natural man. It seems quite obvious that the natural man cannot cast out demons, prophesy, heal the sick or cleanse a leper. But the problem lies much deeper than that because the natural man is fundamentally unable even to understand the Scriptures or to discern spiritual things:

1 Corinthians 2:14 MKJV *(14) But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Some aspects of the natural man persist in us after conversion. We live in a skeptical, unbelieving world, and at times this strongly influences us. Our minds need to be renewed so they believe all that they should believe! The effect of this is that until our faith matures many aspects of spiritual ministry are going to seem foolish, frightening or impossible. This is normal and it should be overcome with prayer, bible study and godly determination.

However, if we give in to our hesitation, and flee from attempting the 'impossible' then the results are spiritually disastrous.

We will see difficult people as 'impossible to convert' so we give up on evangelism, or 'impossible to heal' so we give up praying for the sick, or 'impossible to change' so we cease speaking prophetic truth when morally required to do so.

If we continue on in this process of giving way to our hesitations and unbelief then we end up with an entirely man-made religion which seeks to replace the risk of dependence on the Holy Spirit with the safety of institutions, committees, rules, laws and programs. Man-made religion ends up converting people to itself and not to God:

Matthew 23:15 MKJV *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you compass sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

The cure for this man-made religion is an aggressive faith in the God who does the impossible. Christian faith is alive, dynamic and trusts God to turn up and minister in His Name. Christian faith actively attempts what seems impossible to man. It is not intimidated by the heavenly calling but rather gladly enters in. True Christian faith is gracious and freeing and needs no bureaucracy to justify it. It is justified by its deeds, done in the power of God alone.

Such faith tells us that what is impossible with man, is still possible with God:

Matthew 19:26 MKJV *But Jesus looked on them and said to them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*

In other verses Jesus makes it plain that he expected His disciples to succeed in things that other people considered impossible:

Matthew 17:20 MKJVFor truly I say to you, If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Move from here to there. And it shall move. And nothing shall be impossible to you.

Mark 9:23 MKJV Jesus said to him, If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.

Mark 11:23-24 MKJV For truly I say to you that whoever shall say to this mountain, Be moved and be cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he said shall occur, he shall have whatever he said. (24) Therefore I say to you, All things, whatever you ask, praying, believe that you shall receive them, and it will be to you.

Often when Jesus gave His disciples a task it was unachievable by natural human means. Some examples: feeding the 5000; asking Peter to walk on water; commanding twelve men to make disciples of all nations; and sending out the 70 to heal the sick, cast out demons and proclaim the gospel.

God thinks big thoughts. And if you want to be used by God then you will have to join Him in thinking big! This is an absolute. No person who was guarded, cautious, or small-minded made it into the Hebrews 11 Hall of Fame! In fact, millions of those kinds of people 'fell in the Wilderness'. Only two made it through – Joshua and Caleb, and they were the ones who believed in doing the impossible (with God's help)!

In fact, all real ministry involves attempting the impossible! Even bible teaching! Even successful preaching! Because people are so stubborn that no life can be deeply changed by mere words alone or mere philosophy alone. You cannot change a single life, even your own life, unless the Holy Spirit comes alongside to help you.

Now in ministry we continually hit a psychological wall whereby we think “I'd like to do that good thing, maybe even God is calling me to do that good thing, but I simply cannot do it because....” (fill in the blanks with whatever you feel that you are lacking – time, money, people, resources, energy, wisdom, skill, support from others, human permission to get started etc.)

However, God's calling is God's enabling. It is up to you to believe and up to God to supply. God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply.

You do not need an office before you can start ministering – start at home. You do not need permission from a church or a pastor to teach the Word – just start teaching online. You do not need to hire a stadium before you can evangelize, just start witnessing to those whom the Lord brings your way. Once you start out on doing the impossible then you will find the people and resources and wisdom will come to you from all sorts of different directions.

Have big dreams but be content to start small at first. That is what the parable of the mustard-seed is all about:

Luke 13:18-19 MKJV And He said, What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? (19) It is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and threw into his garden. And it grew and became a great tree, and the birds of the air lodged in its branches.

This ministry of the impossible is a ministry of great boldness, for faith results in boldness of speech and of lifestyle:

Acts 4:31 MKJV *And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness.*

Ephesians 6:19-20 MKJV *And pray for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, (20) for which I am an ambassador in bonds; so that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Indeed God has not called us to timidity:

2 Timothy 1:7 GNB *For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.*

The ministry of the impossible requires that we put aside our timid reservations and instead become bold, powerful, believers who step out in faith to do the great works that God, in His large-mindedness, has prepared beforehand for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). In the words of a business guru you should have a BHAG (a Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal). You should have a 'conquering Canaan' mentality. You should be a Joshua or a Caleb.

If you are called to be a bible-teacher, decide to teach the nations and start working towards the biggest possible teaching goal that you can ever imagine.

If you are called to be a pastor, think about how many churches you will plant. Not just one or two, but perhaps hundreds. Think of how to reach your whole community and not just 200 or 500 or even 10,000 members of it.

If you have a healing ministry, think of healing crusades, of having a healing center, of training others in healing ministry and so on.

If you are an evangelist, think of using every means at your disposal – Internet evangelism, testimonies on YouTube, radio, local cable TV, personal witnessing, tracts, crusades, showing the Jesus film and so on...

Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 1:6). And true Abraham-like faith attempts things that the world considers "impossible" (Romans 4:17-22).

61: The Essence Is Christ

The essence of spiritual ministry is the Spirit of Christ and the character of Christ and the teaching of Christ. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone and the foundation upon which all spiritual ministry must be constructed:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 MKJV *(10) According to the grace of God which is given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let every man be careful how he builds on it. (11) For any other foundation can no one lay than the one being laid, who is Jesus Christ. (12) And if anyone builds on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, (13) each one's work shall be revealed. For the Day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try each one's work as to what kind it is. (14) If anyone's work which he built remains, he shall receive a reward. (15) If anyone's work shall be burned up, he shall suffer loss. But he shall be saved, yet so as by fire.*

So we see two categories here:

- a) High quality ministry, built on Christ, work done in gold, silver and precious stones
- b) Low quality ministry that is still Christian – building with wood, hay and stubble

Only the high quality ministry survives the fire of Judgment Day and receives a reward! The ministries of gold, silver and precious stones are those done carefully and faithfully using the materials of the Scriptures and the Spirit of God and refined in the fire of tested obedience.

The ministries of wood, hay and stubble are attempts to do Christian ministry with human strength. The people are believers but instead of using the Scriptures and the Spirit they try to take shortcuts. They attempt to build on Christ with human intellect and philosophy, or with business principles, politics and the strawy ideas of this world. A haystack can be made very large in a week and these methods can lead to large followings in a short period of time. But God does not think these ministries are worthy!

Even worse than ministries of straw, are false prophets and ministries of iniquity:

Matthew 7:21-23 MKJV *Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. (22) Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? (23) And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!*

These are self-deluded and believe they are prophesying, casting out demons and doing mighty works when in fact they are not even Christians in the first place!!

They are full of the spirit of this world and Satan, the god of this world, loves them and lavishes money on them. While they believe they are ministering "In Jesus name" they are in fact they are just building their own name!! They are disobedient to God and are often full of pride, greed and adultery. They operate like selfish egotistical corporate executives rather than as followers of the cross.

Combining the two passages above, we find that there are three kinds of ministry:

- a) High quality ministry that builds on Christ well and is rewarded.
- b) Low quality ministry that still builds on Christ, but in an inferior way. God will burn the ministry up, but the person themselves will be saved.
- c) Deceitful ministry, false prophets, and workers of iniquity who do not build on Christ in any way, shape or form - except 'in name only'. These false ministers are cast into Hell.

None of us wants to see our ministry go up in smoke on Judgment Day and none of us wants to be a worker of iniquity. So the question then becomes: "How do we build with gold, silver and precious stones?"

At the beginning of this study I said: "*The essence of spiritual ministry is the Spirit of Christ and the character of Christ and the teaching of Christ.*"

A ministry that works with gold, silver and precious stones will have the Spirit of Christ which is reflected in the Beatitudes and the Sermon On the Mount. Christ was lowly, meek, and humble and was never self-serving:

Matthew 11:28-30 MKJV *Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take My yoke on you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. (30) For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.*

The Spirit of Christ is one of self-renunciation. Of leaving the world behind and even one's life behind in order to seek after the Kingdom of God and His righteousness:

Mark 8:34-37 MKJV *And calling near the crowd with His disciples, He said to them, Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. (35) For whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, he shall save it. (36) For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (37) Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

A ministry that works with gold, silver and precious stones will seek to have the character of Christ and to follow in the footsteps of Christ who made Himself nothing, indeed who even made Himself a servant to all:

Matthew 20:25-28 MKJV *But Jesus called them and said, You know that the rulers of the nations exercise dominion over them, and they who are great exercise authority over them. (26) However, it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant. (27) And whoever desires to be chief among you, let him be your servant; (28) even as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*

And a ministry that works with gold, silver and precious stones will obey the teachings of Christ and all His commandments, especially the commandments about loving God and loving your neighbor as you love yourself. The 'red letter' commands of the gospels will be taken very seriously indeed.

The poor, the needy, the sick, the suffering, the stray sheep and the unsaved souls will be given priority. There will be honesty, integrity, grace and compassion. The tongue will speak the right words and people will be treated well.

The obeying of Christ's commandments will fill the whole ministry from the lives of the top leadership down to the volunteer staff. There will be a sense that the entire ministry is a place of obedience, and is submitted wholly unto God. This may even require the senior leadership to lead lives of personal sacrifice and example. They know they have received freely and they will freely give.

When the Devil sees Christ he attacks. And if your spiritual ministry is glorifying Jesus, it will be attacked relentlessly. Your faith, like gold, silver and precious stones, is tested by fire (1 Peter 1:7) and some of the most godly ministries have faced severe trials:

1 Peter 4:12-14 MKJV *Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trial which is to try you, as though a strange thing happened to you, (13) but rejoice according as you are partakers of Christ's suffering, so that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. (14) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of God and of glory rests on you. Truly according to them, He is blasphemed, but according to you He is glorified.*

A ministry that is full of glory and of the Spirit of Christ is humble, worshipful, reverent, bold, truthful, long-suffering, gracious, God-fearing and free of ego. People tremble at God's Word and love the Lord with all their heart and mind and strength and they care about each other first and foremost.

A ministry that does not care much about its own people is in serious spiritual error. The ministry objectives or ministry finances are in no way more important than the health and spiritual well-being of those who work for the organization. The need for staff commitment must be balanced with a proper duty of care by the leadership. (And I speak as one in leadership).

True spiritual ministry flows from the Spirit of Christ, is done in the character of Christ, and proceeds out of reverent obedience to all the commandments of Jesus Christ. These Christ-centered things must be the core of all we do, the essence of why we exist and the ethos and "flavor" of our church, our ministry or our missions organization.

If your ministry has wandered off-course, bring it back to center. Determine to get rid of ego and worldliness and to focus on full Christ-like obedience to God.

62: The Ministry of The Word - Part 1

Spiritual ministry flows from the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit, and which equips the man of God for every good work:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 MKJV *All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (17) that the man of God may be perfected, thoroughly furnished to every good work.*

Hebrews 4:12 MKJV *For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing apart of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

Ephesians 6:17 MKJV *... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,*

The apostles saw the ministry of the Word and prayer as their two top priorities (Acts 6:2-4). And teaching the word was the main job of the church elders appointed by Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 2:7, 3:2, Titus 1:7-9) as well as the apostolic leaders themselves (1 Timothy 4:11-13, 2 Timothy 1:11, 2:24, 4:2).

The central focus of the ministry of the Word is Christ, His character and His commandments. Even the Old Testament Scriptures are about Christ (Luke 24:27,44 1 Corinthians 1:10-11, 2 Timothy 3:15). We should be talking about Jesus a lot!

The focus of the NT is on the four gospels which set forth Christ. Acts and the epistles then explain the message of the gospel and its spread among the nations and correct misunderstandings about Christ, His character and His commandments. The apostles saw proclaiming Christ and Him crucified as their central, even only, task (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Other issues are secondary (though they may be important). There are brief passages about church order, leadership, ethical and moral issues and family life. There is almost no teaching about politics.

The ministry of the Word involves the plain setting forth of Christ and of His salvation. It is not about human philosophy, or politics or the ideas of the age. It is not even about social issues such as abortion or family or health care, as urgent as these may seem.

Unless we teach Christ first and Christ deeply these other issues will be addressed in vain. Without Christ's example of agape love and His commands regarding relationships all our teaching on family becomes futile. Paul's epistles always outlined the doctrine of Christ first and foremost before addressing the practical issues of the Church.

The ministry of the Word is not about theological speculation, or even about 'bible knowledge' (as in bible trivia quizzes). The Pharisees had tremendous bible knowledge, and the scribes and Sadducees were theologians, but they did not understand Christ!

John 5:39-40 MKJV *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. And they are the ones witnessing of Me, (40) and you will not come to Me that you might have life.*

We should not be learning the Bible just for the sake of learning the Bible. Our teaching should come out of the Scriptures but should point to Christ Jesus (as the Scriptures themselves do). We should aim at producing growing faith in Christ and not just at imparting knowledge. Our goal in teaching is salvation and maturity in Christ Jesus and full obedience to His commandments:

Colossians 1:27-29 MKJV *(27) For to them God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, (28) whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. (29) For which I also labor, striving according to the working of Him who works in me in power.*

Governments will change and the systems of this world will pass away but the Word of the Lord will stand forever. Therefore, teaching Christ from the Word is the most important thing we can do because it has eternal consequences, life for some and death for others:

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 EMTV *(14) Now thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and making known through us the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. (15) For we are the fragrance of Christ to God among those being saved, and among those perishing. (16) To some we are the fragrance of death leading to death, but to others the fragrance of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? (17) For we are not as the rest, corrupting the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.*

The apostle Paul trembles as he contemplates the ministry of the Word crying out: *And who is sufficient for these things?* The ministry of the Word is a high and holy task, not a means of commercial profit (2 Corinthians 2:17 above). It is something to be pursued with purity and integrity and with the awareness that teachers experience a much stricter judgment (James 3:1).

The ministry of the Word is primary because it is the ministry that causes faith to grow in the hearts of believers.

Romans 10:17 EMTV *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

And without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

The other spiritual gifts are useful but they must operate in tandem with the ministry of the Word. For instance, healing the body without proclaiming Christ is just a mere delaying of people's entrance into a Christ-less eternity.

Even prayer depends on the ministry of the Word and the intercessors knowledge of the power and the promises of God.

Finally we must address the issue of how the Holy Spirit works together with the proclamation of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit's role is to glorify Christ :

John 16:13-15 MKJV *However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth. For He shall not speak of Himself, but whatever He hears, He shall speak. And He will announce to you things to come. (14) He will glorify Me, for He will receive of Mine and will*

announce it to you. (15) All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and will announce it to you.

And the Holy Spirit is the author of the Holy Scriptures:

2 Peter 1:21 MKJV *For prophecy was not borne at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke being borne along by the Holy Spirit.*

Thus the spiritual ministry of the Word will involve active cooperation with the Holy Spirit as He seeks to glorify Christ. This will come about as we, with renewed minds, study the Scriptures which are the textbook of the Holy Spirit. As we dig into the Bible the Holy Spirit will 'take of Mine' (the things of God in the pages of the Scriptures) and reveal them to us. Praise be to God!

63: Ministry Of The Word – Part 2

The ministry of the Word is at its best when it connects with the true spiritual needs of the audience and leads to spiritual outcomes such as repentance, conversion and growth in love. The ministry of the Word should have an 'edge' to it like that of a 'two-edged sword' and be able to cut to the heart and divide joints from marrow and soul from spirit. It should be like a healing scalpel of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 4:12 MKJV *For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing apart of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

The final phrase here is a big clue on how to be effective in spiritual ministry. Aim to be one who discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart and who speaks to them. Once you know what people are thinking in their hearts then you can craft a biblical response:

Matthew 9:2-8 MKJV *And behold, they brought to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, Child, be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven you. (3) And lo, some of the scribes said within themselves, This one blasphemes. (4) And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Why do you think evil in your hearts? (5) For which is easier? To say, Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Arise and walk! (6) But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, then He said to the paralytic, Arise, take up your bed and go to your house. (7) And he arose and departed to his house. (8) But when the crowds saw, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.*

Jesus a) saw faith in the hearts of the friends and offered forgiveness of sins and b) knew what the scribes were thinking in their hearts. In response to this He healed the paralytic as a demonstration that the Son of Man indeed had the power to forgive sins.

Moses and the prophets also addressed what people were thinking within themselves:

Deuteronomy 7:17-19 MKJV *(17) If you shall say in your heart, These nations are more than I; how can I throw them out? (18) You shall not be afraid of them, but shall well remember what Jehovah your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. ...*

Deuteronomy 8:17-18 MKJV *(17) and so that you might not say in your heart, My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth. (18) But you shall remember Jehovah your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, so that He may confirm His covenant which He has sworn to your fathers, as it is today.*

Deuteronomy 9:4-5 MKJV *Do not speak in your heart, after Jehovah your God has cast them out from before you, saying: For my righteousness, Jehovah has brought me in to possess this land. But for the wickedness of these nations, Jehovah your God drives them out from before you. (5) Not for your righteousness, or for the uprightness of your heart, do you go to possess their land. But for the wickedness of these nations Jehovah your God drives them out from before you, so that He may perform the Word which Jehovah swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

Psalms 35:25-26 MKJV *Let them not say in their hearts, Aha! Our Soul! Let them not say, We have swallowed him up. (26) Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor together, those who magnify themselves over me.*

Isaiah 47:8-9 MKJV *Now then hear this, O pleasure seeker, who lives carelessly; who says in her heart, I am, and none else is; I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children. (9) But these two things shall come to you in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood. They shall come on you in their fullness for the multitude of your sorceries, and for the great power of your enchantments.*

Zephaniah 1:12-13 MKJV *And it shall be in that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled on their lees; who say in their heart, Jehovah will not do good, nor will He do evil. (13) And their goods shall become a prize and their houses a waste. They shall also build houses, but not live in them, and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine.*

Matthew 3:8-9 MKJV *Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance; (9) and do not think to say within yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*

Revelation 18:7-8 MKJV *As much as she has glorified herself and has lived in luxury, so much torment and sorrow give her. For she says in her heart, I sit as a queen, and I am not a widow; and I do not see mourning at all. (8) Therefore her plagues will come in one day, death and mourning and famine. And she will be consumed with fire, for the Lord God who judges her is strong.*

There are many other, much longer examples such as the lament over the Satanic pride of the King of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:1-14) and Nebuchadnezzar's fall in Daniel chapter 4 because of the self-exalting thoughts within his heart. Over and over again God judges people and addresses His Word to the 'thoughts and intents of the heart'.

So our words as preachers and teachers should be aimed at what people are thinking in their hearts. We should aim to speak to their fears and anxieties with words of faith and reassurance, to their doubts with evidence for the faith, to their sorrows with words of comfort, to their wicked thoughts with rebuke, to their lusts with exhortations to self-control, and to their coldness, slothfulness and apathy with words of warning about falling away.

Unless we are speaking to the heart we are totally missing the mark. And if we are to speak to the heart we must first listen to God and what He has to say. And we must listen to those whom we are ministering to so that we will know them and their situation. It is only after we have heard that we can speak.

The prophets 'stood in the counsel of the Lord' (Jeremiah 23:18) in order to get a word to speak. They listened for a download from Heaven. It was only after much listening that they would come forth with a powerful message:

Jeremiah 23:29 MKJV *Is not My Word like a fire? says Jehovah; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*

So the ministry of the Word involves:

- a) Loving the Lord and knowing His will
- b) Loving your audience and knowing the thoughts and intents hearts
- c) Speaking the truth you heard from God in ways that the audience you are speaking to can grasp clearly, so that spiritual results ensue.

Ok, you might be asking “What is the difference between the thoughts of the heart and the intentions of the heart?” The thoughts of the heart are simply what you are thinking in your inner man. This can be something like Nebuchadnezzar’s “Behold Babylon, that I have made...”. The intentions of the heart are your plans, schemes and will. They are what you intend to do, either good or evil:

Psalms 10:2-3 MKJV *The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor; let them be taken in the plans that they have imagined. (3) For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire, and blesses the covetous whom Jehovah despises.*

Psalms 20:4-5 MKJV *May He grant you according to your own heart, and fulfill all your plans. (5) We will rejoice in your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up banners; may Jehovah fulfill all your prayers.*

Good preaching and teaching aims to speak to people at their point of interior spiritual need. This is different from their felt need or their perceived need. Most people, if asked, will tell you that their felt or perceived need is something such as: finances, good health, a partner, resolution of a family conflict, success, a new car, to pay off the house or to fulfill their vision and destiny. But these acutely felt needs are seldom their true spiritual needs. God may fulfill these desires as well (for they are normal good desires) but these are not the primary needs of the human soul.

The true spiritual needs are things such as: repentance, faith, salvation, grace, peace, a better prayer life, a more loving heart, patience with others, endurance, forbearance, knowledge of God's will, self-control, wisdom, sanctification, hope and a deeper anointing in ministry. Our preaching and teaching need to be aimed at these second set of needs. If these spiritual needs are being met, then the other (felt and perceived) needs will often be taken care of along the way. For instance, wisdom, a more loving heart and greater patience with others will help end most family conflicts.

We need insight into the Scriptures, insight into people, and insight into God's will for those people, at this time. When those things come together in our teaching we can wield the sword of the Spirit and tear down powers and principalities that are lodged both in human hearts and in the spiritual realms.

64: Ministry Of The Word – Part 3

The spiritual ministry of the Word involves diligent, careful and prayerful study:

2 Timothy 2:15 MKJV *Study earnestly to present yourself approved to God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*

Every good bible teacher I know has a house full of books, commentaries, different bible versions, maps, bible dictionaries and language helps for Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. There is simply no getting away from the requirement to study. Paul's request to Timothy was to '*bring... the books and parchments*' (2 Timothy 4:13) indicating that of all Paul's possessions these were among the most vital. It also indicates that Paul was still studying even in his old age. (2 Timothy was written just before his death).

2 Timothy 4:13 MKJV *When you come, bring the cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.*

We are to be earnest students of God's Word. We are to rightly divide the Word of Truth. There is to be scholarly integrity in the process. We cannot just make it up as we go along in a fanciful way. Inspiration does not excuse carelessness.

False teachers tend to fall into two different camps:

- a) Firstly the liberals who deny the Scriptures in the name of reason and insert their own humanistic philosophies.
- b) Secondly the cult leaders who are fond of their own personal inspiration and who override the plain meaning of the Scriptures with their imaginations and dubious 'revelations'.

As different as the personalities of these people may be they have this in common – they refuse to carefully, prayerfully submit their minds to the task of understanding the Scriptures as the final, inspired, inerrant and authoritative word of God.

Spiritual ministry should not neglect serious bible study. Prophecy, tongues, words of wisdom and knowledge are good. But unless we commit ourselves to serious diligent study of the Word we can quickly go off track and end up preaching 'chaff':

Jeremiah 23:28-29 MKJV *The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream. And he who has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? says Jehovah. (29) Is not My Word like a fire? says Jehovah; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*

We need both the Spirit and the Word, prayer and study, inspiration and perspiration, revelation and application - trembling with a holy carefulness based on the fear of God.

2 Corinthians 5:10-11 MKJV *(10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive the things done through the body, according to that which he has done, whether good or bad. (11) Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men...*

The first duty of the bible teacher is to be accurate and truthful. Solid Christian lives can only be built upon the Truth, spoken in love:

Ephesians 4:15-16 MKJV *But that you, speaking the truth in love, may in all things grow up to Him who is the Head, even Christ; (16) from whom the whole body, fitted together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of each part, producing the growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love.*

1 Timothy 2:7 MKJV *To this I am ordained a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie), a teacher of the nations, in faith and truth.*

In the light of yesterday's devotional about speaking to the 'thoughts and intents of the heart' and the previous devotionals about Christ being the essence and center of all spiritual ministry, we can arrive at the conclusion that the ministry of the Word involves:

Being a diligent earnest workman, who rightly, prayerfully, lovingly and truthfully divides the Word of God, so that Christ is clearly presented to the hearts and minds of the audience, addressing the thoughts and intents of the heart like a two-edged sword.

We need to speak the truth in love. Though rebuke is sometimes necessary, inappropriate harshness does not win souls. While spiritual ministry should be accurate and to the point it should not be burdensome, overly heavy, or humiliating.

Isaiah 42:3 MKJV *A bruised reed He shall not break, and a smoking wick He shall not quench; He shall bring out judgment to truth.*

We need to study not just what we should teach (as in the subject matter), but also how, when and where we should teach these things (timing of the Word, curriculum design, teaching methodology, use of media and the Internet etc.) as well as who we should be addressing (teaching for a specific group such as teenagers, bible students, leaders, non-Christians, etc.) and even why we should be teaching these things in the first place (what is our philosophy, vision, mission calling etc.).

For instance, you may decide to do a simplified outline and summary of the book of Romans for new believers, that are teenagers and you will do this in print and upload it to the Internet and make it available as an upload on mobile phones because you are a youth pastor and you are called to reach post-modern Western youth with a deeper understanding of the gospel. You will do this prayerfully and carefully and you will not compromise on the truth along the way.

You don't need access to a pulpit in order to teach the Word. You can teach individuals who you disciple, or small groups, or even online. Just start wherever you can start!

The requirement to be a good workman, assiduously seeking the Truth means that highly speculative areas of the faith should be left well alone:

1 Timothy 1:3-4 MKJV *Even as I begged you to remain at Ephesus, when I was going to Macedonia, that you might charge some that they teach no other doctrine, (4) nor to give heed to fables and endless genealogies (which provide doubts rather than the nurture of God in faith).*

1 Timothy 4:6-7 MKJV *Having suggested these things to the brothers, you shall be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the Words of Faith and by the good doctrine which you have followed. (7) But refuse profane and old-womanish tales, and exercise yourself to godliness.*

2 Timothy 2:14-16 MKJV *Put them in memory of these things, charging them before the Lord not to dispute about words to no profit, to the subverting of the hearers. (15) Study earnestly to present yourself approved to God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. (16) But shun profane, vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.*

Titus 1:13-14 MKJV *This witness is true; for which cause convict them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith, (14) not giving heed to Jewish myths and commandments of men, turning away from the truth.*

We are to avoid myths, fables, legalism, commandments of men, disputes about words, endless genealogies, Internet rumors and wild tales, end time date-setting (see Acts 1:7) and the like.

We should also be sufficiently humble to not teach in areas which we do not yet understand. God does not ask you to be an instant expert on all things! Not many single people are able to teach well on marriage and very few married people are able to teach well on long-term singleness. Some books of the Bible (such as Job) are more difficult to teach on than others and some areas of theology take years to fully grasp. Faithful, careful, prayerful bible teaching involves teaching what we know, not what we do not know!

The ministry of the Word is a heavy responsibility (James 3:1,2) precisely because it is so vital to the growth of the Church. Wrong teaching can be incredibly destructive. We should teach as those who know they will have to give an account to Jesus for our words:

Matthew 12:35-37 MKJV *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings out good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings out evil things. (36) But I say to you that every idle word, whatever men may speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment. (37) For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.*

If we are diligent, careful and craftsman-like in how we hand the Scriptures then we will be a *workman that does not need to be ashamed*. Diligence will save us from judgment, and from having our work burned up like chaff, straw, wood, hay or stubble. Studying to show ourselves approved may be hard work now, but it will be well worth it on that Day!

65: The Ministry of Prayer – Part 1

Prayer was a top priority for the apostles in Jerusalem:

Acts 6:4 MKJV *But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.*

Prayer lies at the heart of revival and should be a top priority for every Christian, especially church leaders who should pray for the spiritual growth of those in their care, just as Paul did:

Ephesians 1:15-20 MKJV *Therefore I also, hearing of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love to all the saints, (16) do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, (17) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, (18) the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, (19) and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us, the ones believing according to the working of His mighty strength (20) which He worked in Christ in raising Him from the dead, and He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies,*

Most Christians pray for their own needs and for the needs of those close to them, for things such as jobs, healing and daily bread - and that is good and fine and Scriptural. God is our helper and delights to answer those kinds of prayers.

However, there is a ministry of prayer whereby we pray for God's agenda on the basis of the Scriptures and the knowledge of His will. Jesus' prayer in John 17 for the sanctification of His disciples and the unity of believers is a prayer of this type. For this kind of prayer, we need to have an understanding of what God wants done in the situation, and our prayer joins with His will in order to bring it to pass. This is clearly the case with praying that laborers will be sent forth into the Harvest:

Matthew 9:36-38 MKJV *But seeing the crowds, He was moved with compassion on them, because they were tired and scattered like sheep having no shepherd. (37) Then He said to His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. (38) Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest that He will send out laborers into His harvest.*

It is God's will that people be saved, and God's will that people be raised up to proclaim the gospel and bring in the Harvest, but Jesus still asks for us to pray for it!

It is the same with Paul's prayer for the Ephesians above. It is clearly God's will that people will understand Christ more fully – but Paul still prayed for it to occur!

The ministry of prayer is where we use prayer to accomplish the goals of Christian ministry. It is where prayer is used to raise up laborers or when prayer is the means of imparting wisdom and enlightenment to new Christians. Prayer alone can accomplish these things, because prayer is to God, and all things are possible with God.

Things we can pray for in this way include the following:

- 1) Our enemies and those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44)
- 2) God's honor, will and Kingdom (Matthew 6:9-10)
- 3) Daily provision (Matthew 6:11)
- 4) Forgiveness of sin (Matthew 6:12, 1 John 1:9) even for others (1 John 5:16)
- 5) Escape from hard testing and temptation (Matthew 6:13, 24:20, 26:41)
- 6) The blessing of little children (Matthew 19:13)
- 7) Healing (James 5:14-16, Acts 9:40, 28:18)
- 8) Deliverance (Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29)
- 9) Acts of power that will glorify God (James 5:16-18)
- 10) Wisdom (James 1:5-8)
- 11) Spiritual strengthening in Christ (Ephesians 3:14-21)
- 12) Spiritual understanding for new Christians (Ephesians 1:15-20, Philippians 1:9-11)
- 13) Knowledge of the will of God (Colossians 1:9-11)
- 14) The impartation of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15, 9:17)
- 15) The sanctification of believers (John 17:17-19)
- 16) That believers will 'do no evil' (2 Corinthians 13:7)
- 17) The perfection of believers (2 Corinthians 13:9, Colossians 4:12)
- 18) Fulfillment of the spiritual calling on a Church, with power (2 Thessalonians 1:11,12)
- 19) The unity of believers (John 17:20-23)
- 20) Opportunities for gospel ministry (Romans 1:10, Colossians 4:2-4, 2 Thess 3:1)
- 21) Boldness in ministry (Acts 4:24-31, Ephesians 6:19)
- 22) Laborers for the Harvest (Matthew 9:38)
- 23) The selection of leaders to be sent out (Luke 6:12,13; Acts 13:1-4, 14:23)
- 24) Deliverance from danger (Acts 12:5, Romans 15:30,31; 2 Thessalonians 3:2)
- 25) The salvation of certain ethnic groups – such as the Jews (Romans 10:1)

26) The salvation of leaders and those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

27) Anything that is for God's glory & purpose (Matthew 21:21,22; John 16:23,24)

(For an update on this list see the Appendix where it is expanded to 28 things and more bible verses and notes are added.)

All of the above 27 things have the following elements in common:

- 1) They are first of all grounded God's will & purposes for His saints and His Church
- 2) Our task is to pray that they shall come to pass in specific real world situations

God's will in Heaven happens locally on earth, only through our prayers. God's perfect will is brought into reality in our homes, neighborhoods, cities and churches through the intercession of the saints. We cannot just say "If X is God's will then X will happen whether I pray or not" (otherwise why would Jesus have prayed for Christian unity?).

If we want unity in our church and among our churches in our city – then we will have to intercede for it. If we want Russia saved – we will have to pray for it. If we want a moral government with righteous laws, which allows the peaceful proclamation of the gospel – then we will have to pray for it!!

The ministry of prayer focuses on making God's will manifest in each and every home, heart, city and neighborhood. This is far from automatic and involves wrestling against significant powers and principalities (Ephesians 6:10-13) along with fervent labor in prayer (Colossians 4:12).

The ministry of prayer catches God's heart for a certain area or person or segment of society then prays the burden through to completion. Some people have a heart for the homeless, others for students who struggle with their faith, still others pray for the mission fields of the world or for a specific nation or tribe.

In the ministry of prayer, the focus is on what God wants done through us at that point of time. It is not about us or our comfort and desires. It is about seeing what God's Kingdom needs, and then asking the Father for it, in faith, and with thanksgiving.

Colossians 4:2 MKJV *Continue in prayer and watch in it with thanksgiving,*

Matthew 21:22 MKJV *And all things, whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.*

1 John 5:14-15 MKJV *And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (15) And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.*

If we petition for the 27 items on the list above, we will be praying in God's will and for God's glory. We will be praying out of concern for God's Kingdom, His Church and His salvation to be spread abroad to those who have not yet heard.

God wants to set your prayer life on fire! And that will happen when you pray for the things that God most wants prayed for, on the basis of the promises of God!

66: The Ministry of Prayer -2

We learned from the last study that God's purpose for prayer is for His will to be done locally, here on earth, as it is in Heaven. Prayer changes things so that they become the way that God wants them to be. Prayer follows the purposes of our Heavenly Father!

So it is as we line up our wills with the Father's will that God's miraculous prayer answering power flows through us as it did through Elijah and through the prophets:

James 5:16-18 MKJV *Confess faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous one avails much. (17) Elijah was a man of like passion as we are. And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for the time of three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to sprout.*

This naturally leads to the question of authority and power in prayer. Of how we can get God's will to be done on earth when we are opposed by principalities and powers in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).

If prayer is to achieve everything that God has purposed for it then it has to have some 'clout'. It has to be a lot more than mere words sent up to the ceiling. God gives us a glimpse of the power of prayer in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 8:3-5 MKJV *And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer. And many incenses were given to him, so that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints on the golden altar before the throne. (4) And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God from the angel's hand. (5) And the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar, and cast it into the earth. And voices and thunderings and lightnings and an earthquake occurred.*

This is prayer that literally 'shakes the world'! Our prayers will have great power when they are lined up with God's purposes and little or no power if they are self-centered:

James 4:3 MKJV *You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it upon your lusts.*

So power in prayer comes, first and foremost, from praying for the purposes of God. The handout that I sent out earlier this week (28 Things That God Wants You To Pray For) gives a list of what God's purposes for prayer are.

Power and authority in prayer are related but different. Authority is always a gift, for example when Pharaoh elevated Joseph from the dungeon to the palace in a single day. Power is what happens as you exercise that authority. God gives you authority, you then use this God-given authority to exercise power in ministry. If you are complacent and do not use your authority, then you have no power.

Your authority (in Christ) is immense (and we will talk about this in a later study) but it is not an independent authority. Your authority comes from the King of Kings. You are an ambassador for Christ and it is only when you do the will of the King and carry out the purposes of the King that your authority is valid.

So the first thing we need to do in the ministry of prayer is to learn what God's will is and then to surrender our will to it. We may want to pray for money but God may want us to pray for souls instead! Or we may want to pray for a new facility when God wants us to pray for justice in our community. We may have to press the "pause" button on our desires and ask for God to tell us His desires!

There are urgent things that God wants done, that no one is praying for. Perhaps the problems we are having with the Muslim world stem, in part, from the fact that very few people have been praying for those nations. We have got to stop deciding what we want to pray for! Ask God to show you new things to pray for, things that He wants to bring to birth in His Kingdom!

For example here are ten things that I believe that God is doing, yet few are praying for:

1. The raising up of visionary mission-minded pastors, evangelists and teachers for the End Time Global harvest.
2. The conversion of the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist worlds
3. More spiritual discernment in the body of Christ to stop false teaching etc.
4. The moral purity of the Church and its repentance from worldly values
5. The understanding and practice of agape love by all believers everywhere
6. Greater cooperation between churches, ministries and Christians in general
7. The tearing down of demonic cultural strongholds
8. Protection of the leadership of the persecuted church & for its doctrinal purity
9. New methods of evangelism e.g. Internet evangelism
10. Restraint of the global forces of evil & of wickedness in high places

You can probably generate your own list that is relevant to you and to your community. The point being that we need to pray as God wants us to pray, for those things which are most important to God's Kingdom and God's glory.

God knows what we need, well in advance, and when we take up His cross and His agenda then our needs will be supplied as part of the package. God has no desire to short-change us! He wants to bless us. But we are blessed to be a blessing, and not just for ourselves alone.

Sometimes the area we should be praying most in is very obvious. For instance, someone with the gift of healing should pray for the sick, a pastor should pray for his or her church members and a missionary should pray for the people God has sent him to. Yet we also need to ask God to show us 'other things' that He wants us to intercede about. It may be our national leadership, a gross injustice towards Christians, a community situation or a war somewhere in the earth.

As we enter into these situations we will find a new authority and power in prayer because we will be praying 'with' the Holy Spirit. Our prayers will be stirred up within us by God and we will be praying what God wants. And if we are praying what God wants, then God will answer!

Since we will be wrestling against unseen powers and principalities we will need to persist in these prayers. We will need to groan and travail and pray in the Spirit for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in Heaven, and we must not give up:

Romans 8:26 MKJV *Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Luke 11:5-10 MKJV *And He said to them, which of you shall have a friend and shall go to him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves, (6) for a friend of mine has come from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him? (7) And he answering from inside may say, Do not trouble me. The door is now shut and my children are in bed with me. I cannot rise and give to you. (8) I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needs. (9) And I say to you, Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened to you. (10) For everyone who asks receives. And he who seeks finds. And to him who knocks it shall be opened.*

Persistent prayer that is prioritized around the purposes of God is powerful.

67: Praying In Jesus' Name

To speak in someone's name is to speak with their delegated power and authority. British policemen carry out their duties 'in the name of the Queen'. This authority only exists when he or she is in uniform and acting in Her Majesty's name. The authority of the name is not personal authority belonging to the policeman. If they should leave the police force it would vanish entirely. The policemen are also given tasks, ranks, areas of operation and so forth that indicate where their authority is primarily to be used.

All salvation is through the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12): whether it be salvation from judgment (justification) or salvation from the power of sin (sanctification) or salvation from illness (healing). In fact the bible describes Christians as those who 'call upon the name of the Lord' for salvation:

1 Corinthians 1:2 MKJV *to the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called out with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. (see also Acts 9:14,21)*

The name of Jesus means Savior:

Matthew 1:21 MKJV *And she shall bear a son, and you shall call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins.*

And to call on that Name, by faith, brings healing and wholeness:

Acts 3:6 MKJV *But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!*

Acts 3:16 MKJV *And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, this one whom you see and know, His name made firm.*

Of course the Name of Jesus brings salvation to eternal life:

John 20:31 MKJV *But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name.*

Acts 4:12 MKJV *And there is salvation in no other One; for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

Acts 10:43 MKJV *All the Prophets give witness to Him, that through His name whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins.*

Romans 10:13 MKJV *For everyone, "whoever shall call on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

With this in mind let's look at the NT passages about praying in the Name of Jesus:

John 14:12-14 MKJV *Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these he shall do, because I go to My Father. (13) And*

whatever you may ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

John 15:16 MKJV *You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you.*

John 16:23-24 MKJV *And in that day you shall ask Me nothing. Truly, truly, I say to you, Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give you. (24) Before now you have asked nothing in My name; ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.*

John 16:26 MKJV *At that day you will ask in My name; and I do not say to you that I will pray to the Father for you,*

Let's deal with the puzzling John 16:26 first. In this verse Jesus is saying that we will have direct access to the Father in His Name. Jesus won't have to ask the Father for us. If we are acting and praying in Jesus' proper delegated authority God will automatically hear us and we can ask God the Father by ourselves without having to 'go through' Jesus.

The other 'in My Name' verses in John's gospel use terms such as '*if you ask anything in My Name*' and '*whatever you may ask in My name*'. What does this mean?

Let's go back to the illustration of the British policeman. The policeman cannot go into a restaurant and order caviar on toast and a whole roast turkey 'in the name of the Queen!' But he can commandeer a car or truck in an emergency situation to save lives. Within certain limits at certain times, policemen can 'ask anything' and get it.

All these high-powered promises 'in Jesus' Name' are found in the Upper Room discourse in John 14-17 where Jesus is speaking to the Eleven (Judas has left the room) and where He is now teaching those who will soon be going out into ministry. The meaning is something like: "As you go out ministering the gospel of the Kingdom, you can ask anything you like in My Name and I will give it to you, so that you may bear much fruit and glorify My Father's Name."

Let's see how the early Church used the name of Jesus. Firstly, to heal the sick:

James 5:14-15 MKJV *Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (15) And the prayer of faith will cure the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. And if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him. (See also Acts 3:6,16 above)*

And in Acts 16:18 the name of Jesus is used to cast out demons:

Acts 16:18 MKJV *And she did this many days. But being distressed, and turning to the demonic spirit, Paul said, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her! And it came out in that hour.*

And in Acts 4:29-30 to do wonders as a testimony to the gospel:

Acts 4:29-30 MKJV *And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your Word, (30) by stretching forth of Your hand for healing, and miracles, and wonders may be done by the name of Your holy child Jesus.*

Praying in the name of Jesus involves taking up the plans, purposes and delegated authority of God and asking for those things which will glorify His Name such as healing, exorcisms, signs, wonders, Kingdom proclamation and 'greater works' that will bear abiding fruit for the gospel of God. As we see revival breaking out our righteous joy will be made full!!

68: Praying For Your Heart's Desires

As we set our heart on God's desires, He then allows us to pray for our heart's desires:

Psalms 21:1-4 MKJV ...*The king shall rejoice in Your strength, O Jehovah; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! (2) You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the prayer of his lips. Selah. (3) For You go before him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold on his head. (4) He asked life from You; You give to him length of days forever and ever.*

Psalms 37:3-6 MKJV *Trust in Jehovah, and do good; you shall dwell in the land, and you shall be fed on truth. (4) Delight yourself also in Jehovah, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. (5) Roll your way on Jehovah; trust also in Him, and He will work. (6) And He shall bring forth your righteousness like the light, and your judgment like the noonday.*

Psalms 10:17-18 MKJV *Jehovah, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart, You will cause Your ear to hear, (18) to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, so that the man of the earth may no more terrify.*

Psalms 145:16 MKJV *You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.*

There is a balance here. The 'wicked' boast of their hearts desires (Psalm 10:3) and the sluggard craves his desires and gets absolutely nothing (Proverbs 13:4). So when we pray for our heart's desires we must be righteous in our lifestyle and diligent in our work ethic.

God occasionally grants the desires of people who ask for wrong things – such as when the Israelites insisted on having meat and God sent them quail:

Psalms 106:14-15 MKJV *but they lusted greedily in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert. (15) And He gave them what they asked, but sent leanness into their soul.*

Your desires need to be tamed and tutored into the way of Christ. You cannot just insist on God giving you whatever you want. That is not what prayer is about. Your desires have to line up with the will of God, with "His Kingdom and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

When our desires coincide with God's desires prayer becomes very powerful indeed:

1 John 5:14-15 MKJV *And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (15) And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.*

Desires have their seasons. There may be times when God causes you to pray for a normal human desire (such as a partner, a house or a car) that you have not prayed for much before. Before you knew that 'it was not the time' but now the Lord says 'pray for it – now is the time'.

Well what kinds of 'normal human desires' can we pray for? My answer is really vague – 'non-covetous ones'. If it fits God's plan for your life, then pray for it. If it is simply something unnecessary that you want so that you can make the neighbors green with envy – forget it!

Covetousness is idolatry. We should not be praying greedy prayers – but it is quite valid to pray for God's best blessings on your life.

For example, if you travel extensively in ministry it is quite valid to pray for a comfortable and reliable car. If you entertain and have bible studies, then it is valid to pray for a house with a large den or lounge room and good parking (which is what we did). However, I do not feel it would be valid for me to pray for a corporate jet. I don't need it, I couldn't pay for it and I cannot justify it except for sheer ego.

Don't believe the TV preachers. Money is NOT what you desire. Deep down you desire relationship, love, forgiveness, holiness, significance in God's work etc. You desire to see sinner's saved and God's Church built up. (That is if you are a believer).

Money may be a means to these things but it is not to be desired in and of itself. The desire of money leads to disaster (Judas, Demas, Ananias & Sapphira etc.):

Luke 16:13-15 MKJV *No servant can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (14) And being money-lovers, all the Pharisees also heard all these things. And they derided Him. (15) And He said to them, You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*

1 Timothy 6:7-10 MKJV *For we brought nothing into the world, and it is clear that we can carry nothing out. (8) But having food and clothing, we will be content. (9) But they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which plunge men into destruction and perdition. (10) For the love of money is a root of all evils, of which some having lusted after, they were seduced from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

You need to work out what you truly want, not just money, but what the money would buy. What is the reason for the cash? How will it help you? Then pray for the true desire, the end desire such as 'being free to serve the lord without anxiety'. Identify your truly godly desires – then pray in faith, believing that you have received them! (Mark 11:24)

69: Praying With Eternity In View

Colossians 3:1-4 EMTV *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. (2) Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. (4) Whenever Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

It is just so easy to get caught up in Self and with the world and the things thereof. We end up with our minds set on our own busyness and lose sight of Heaven completely. At that point we need to be turned upside down and praying with eternity in view will do just that! Nothing will lift you out of your routine more than getting a glimpse of Eternity!

Paul insists that our mind, and therefore our prayers are to be set on things above, not on the things of the earth (Colossians 3:2 above). The reason for this is that we are citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20), who have been raised with Christ (Colossians 3:1) and who are seated with Him in heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6).

Philippians 3:20-21 EMTV *(20) For our citizenship exists in heaven, from which also we eagerly await for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subject all things to Himself.*

Ephesians 2:6 ASV *and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus:*

Your real self is not the person that you see in the mirror but the person you will be after Christ returns and you are found in Him. Some with very glamorous exteriors will be found to be abominations and objects of horror (Isaiah 66:24). Others who have been humiliated in this life will be glorified in the next like the beggar Lazarus in Luke 16.

The true believer has their life in Christ and has been washed by the blood, cleansed and made whole. The believer is a completely new creation in Christ, an eternal being, with an eternal life, made in the image of Christ Jesus:

Colossians 3:10 MKJV *... and having put on the new, having been renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,*

Romans 8:29 MKJV *For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, for Him to be the First-born among many brothers.*

1 Corinthians 15:49 MKJV *(49) And according as we bore the image of the earthy man, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.*

2 Corinthians 3:18 MKJV *(18) But we all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord Spirit.*

As we pray with eternity in view we are changed from glory to glory by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18 above). Praying with eternity in view changes others as well because we are then praying for what they most need in order to be a joyous citizen of Heaven.

If they are not a believer, we should pray that they will receive repentance and faith.

If they are filled with doubts, we should pray that they grasp the Truth in all its fullness.

If they are struggling with sin, we can pray for their deliverance from temptation.

If they lack wisdom, we can pray that they be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation

If they are new disciples, we can pray that they will understand God's love

If they are slack and drifting away, we can pray that they may know the fear of the Lord.

If they are in ministry we can pray for spiritual protection and an abundant harvest.

If they are a student of the Word we can pray that God will show them Christ.

If we pray with eternity in view, then the needs of this world change – and get much more urgent. We start to tremble at sin and cry out for revival. We see the lost as lost for all eternity and realize how short a time we have to reach them.

If we pray with eternity in view, then the needs of the Church and the glory of the Church fill our minds. Not just a better air-conditioning system but the need for holiness and unity and true fellowship and for the exercise of the spiritual gifts in love.

To some these may seem to be abstract and impractical things. Our culture wants us to be like the fools in Ecclesiastes 10:19 who think that 'money is the answer for everything'. The problem is that money cannot purchase eternal life. God knows perfectly well that we need houses, cars, food, drink, clothes and so on and He will provide these things if we seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Our inheritance is ourselves perfected in Christ. We inherit eternal life, immortality, holiness, sinlessness, incorruption, glory, an undefiled resurrection body and the image of God. We become glorious liberated sons of God who rule and reign with Christ and who finally realize the fullness of who they are as a new creation in Christ Jesus.

Unless we inherit eternal life no other inheritance (such as a grand castle in the sky) will matter because in the end it would be snatched away by death. We have to inherit ourselves in Christ before we can inherit anything else at all.

If we are to inherit ourselves in Christ and enter the Kingdom of God, then our minds and prayers must be fixed above - where our life is hidden with Christ in God. The Holy Spirit will help us to do this if we ask for it His task to show us Christ.

The prayers that we see in the New Testament were prayers for glory to come down, prayers for God to be revealed. Prayers for boldness in preaching, for miracles, for wisdom, revelation, hope, love, and for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

In contrast with the OT, in the NT, there are no prayers for vengeance on enemies or for victory in a physical battle between nations. In fact, the cares of this life are scarcely touched upon in their prayers. They are too busy getting ready for Heaven!

Eternity is what matters and eternity should fill our prayers. When eternity is our central focus then this life's trials will seem far less burdensome because we will realize the glory they are bringing us:

2 Corinthians 4:13-18 MKJV *(13) For we, having the same spirit of faith (according as it is written, "I believed, and therefore I have spoken"); we also believed and therefore speak, (14) knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus shall also raise us up by Jesus, and shall present us with you. (15) For all things are for your sake, so that the super-abounding grace might be made to abound through the thanksgiving of the greater number, to the glory of God. (16) For this cause we do not faint; but though our outward man perishes, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. (17) For the lightness of our present affliction works out for us a far more excellent eternal weight of glory, (18) we not considering the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are not lasting, but the things which are not seen are everlasting.*

Start praying over Scriptures about eternity such as Psalm 91, Revelation chapters 4&5, Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 15:12-58 and so on.

Fill your mind with the heavenly things.

Grasp hold of your reward and your inheritance and start seeing your day-to-day existence in the light of the Throne.

70: Praying For Healing

I prayed for others to be healed for many years, with absolutely no success. I believed in healing and I read extensively about healing but my prayers went nowhere. I actually became very negative about the whole thing and even said to folk: "Don't ask me to pray for your healing because you will probably drop dead!"

In the midst of my despair I noticed that the healing prayers in the New Testament always had the form of a command e.g.: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" or an invocation "Your faith has made you whole, be cleansed." I mentioned that I was preaching at an evening service. I was preaching, and a considerable number of folks came forward for healing and I was trapped – I had to use command prayer! And much to my surprise it actually worked!

When I started praying using the biblical method I began to see about 25% of those I was praying for healed immediately and others healed over a period of a day or two. Though not everyone was healed - it was certainly much better than zero percent!

It has been my conclusion that just as we can command demons to leave in the name of Jesus, we can also command wholeness of mind and body to come forth. Let's look at some of the healing prayers in the New Testament;

Acts 3:6-8 MKJV *But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk! (7) And taking him by the right hand, he lifted him up. And immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. (8) And leaping up, he stood and walked and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.*

Matthew 9:27-29 MKJV *And when Jesus passed on from there, two blind ones followed Him, crying and saying, Son of David, have mercy on us. (28) And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, Do you believe that I am able to do this? They said to Him, Yes, Lord. (29) Then He touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith let it be to you.*

Matthew 9:6-7 MKJV *But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, then He said to the paralytic, Arise, take up your bed and go to your house. (7) And he arose and departed to his house.*

John 11:43-44 RV *And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. (44) He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.*

Mark 1:40-42 RV *And there cometh to him a leper, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. (41) And being moved with compassion, he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou made clean. (42) And straightway the leprosy departed from him, and he was made clean.*

Do you notice something here? In each of these examples Jesus or the apostles use a command formula when they are praying e.g. 'rise up and walk', 'be cleansed' 'according to your faith be it unto you' etc. There is the clear use of spiritual authority to defeat sickness and disease. There is no 'if it be Thy will' praying. They knew they had authority to heal. God had designated healing authority to them and they were using it!

Matthew 10:1 RV *And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness.*

Notice something else. They commanded the desired end state into being. They saw what needed to happen and called it forth! They called the 'things that are not' – as though they were!

Romans 4:17 RV *(as it is written, A father of many nations have I made thee) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth the things that are not, as though they were.*

Jesus told Lazarus to 'come forth'. This end state ("coming forth") necessarily implied that Lazarus would be alive, healthy, walking, talking etc. Similarly, the lame man at the Gate Beautiful was told to "rise up and walk" and the leper was told to "be cleansed". Even when Jesus spoke to the storm he said "Peace, be still" thus invoking the desired end state (a peaceful lake) into being.

The prayer of faith sees what God wants done and calls it forth!

James 5:14-18 MKJV *Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (15) And the prayer of faith will cure the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. And if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him. (16) Confess faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous one avails much. (17) Elijah was a man of like passion as we are. And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for the time of three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to sprout.*

James 5:14-18 tells us that:

1. Healing comes from a prayer of faith
2. Offered under the anointing (both of oil and the Spirit)
3. By people of authority in the fellowship (elders)
4. That confession and absolution of sin may be required
5. That we should be righteous and pray fervently like Elijah did
6. That we can expect our prayers to be highly effective just as Elijah's were
7. That prayer can affect the physical realm (drought, rain, growth) and if prayer can do such massive things as this, then it should also heal the sick (implied way of arguing among Jews – if the greater effect is true then the lesser must be also - e.g. if a truck can carry 2000 pounds then it can surely carry 50 lbs.)

Putting all this together we find that praying for the sick involves:

a) Using our delegated spiritual authority (in the name of Jesus) to command healing in the same way that we do when we cast out demons

b) The structure of healing prayer is generally a command or an invocation focused on a clear result, calling a desired end state into being as if from nothing e.g. 'rise up and walk'.

c) This is a prayer of faith, which envisions the healing happening, seeing it first in the spiritual realm and believing in a good God who loves to heal and Who has the power to do so.

d) Confession of sin may be required. (But don't jump to the conclusion that because they are sick, therefore they must have sinned – see John 9:1-5 on this).

e) Those who pray should be mature Christians who live righteous lives and pray fervently.

This kind of praying feels very risky at first and it is probably best to 'try it out' in a small group setting at first or in situations where you can 'fail safely'. After all, I don't know anyone who heals 100% of the people they pray for. But we don't convert 100% of the people we share the gospel with either (yet we should still share the gospel). Having some healed is way better than having nobody healed and each miraculous healing gives glory to God and to the gospel.

71: Praying In The Opposite Spirit

Luke 23:33-34 MKJV *And when they came to the place which is called Calvary, they crucified Him and the criminals there, one on the right, and one on the left. (34) And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do. And parting His clothing, they cast lots.*

Matthew 5:43-45 MKJV *You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." (44) But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (45) so that you may become sons of your Father in Heaven. For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

One of the most powerful forms of spiritual ministry is when we do not retaliate against evil but instead pray 'in the opposite spirit' so that we love our enemies as Christ commanded us to.

Life is full of negative situations and Satan takes advantage of them. The Devil wants us to become bitter, resentful, hateful and unforgiving because then he can get a foothold in our lives to destroy us spiritually.

Ephesians 4:26-27 ISV *"Be angry, yet do not sin." Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, (27) and do not give the devil an opportunity to work.*

The Devil also wants us to be angry so that we will turn against our friends, family, pastor and church and cause division and defile many:

Hebrews 12:14-15 ASV *Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord: (15) looking carefully lest there be any man that falleth short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby the many be defiled;*

One of the best ways to cope with unjust treatment is to take it to God in prayer, and especially to leave the matter in the Lord's hands: **Romans 12:19 ISV** *Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me. I will pay them back, declares the Lord."*

1 Peter 2:21-23 MKJV *For you were not called to this? For Christ also suffered on our behalf, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps, (22) He who did no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth, (23) who when He was reviled did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but gave Himself up to Him who judges righteously.*

Here are some examples:

- a) Moses interceding for the rebellious Israelites who constantly complained against him and even wanted to kill him. (Exodus 32:30-35)
- b) Jesus interceding for the soldiers who crucified Him (Luke 23:33-34 above)
- c) Stephen praying for forgiveness for those who stoned him. (Acts 7:60)
- d) Paul praying for the salvation of the Jews which persecuted him. (Romans 10:1-4)

This does not just apply to physical persecution but to other things as well. For instance, we can pray that the boss who humiliates us will be blessed or that an annoying neighbor will be saved. Instead of raging and resenting we can be interceding!

Instead of fuming over disruptive social situations pray that their positive opposite may occur. For instance, if you are concerned over corruption pray for integrity and transparency. Pray for the salvation of your leaders and your government, for wisdom, grace and protection and that God may place the love of righteousness and truth in their hearts.

No matter how bad the situation is, you should not pray with rage, anger, bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart!

1 Timothy 2:8 KJV *I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*

I find that when I get worked up over something it takes me some time to get into position to pray in the opposite spirit – or even to work out what the opposite spirit is! For instance, if a person has shown me rejection and contempt then the opposite spirit is one of reconciliation and honor.

Instead of flaring up and vowing revenge I should show them honor (at least in my prayers). I should desire reconciliation. Now they may not ever reconcile – that is up to them. But if I pray aright then my heart would be free of resentment, anger and bitterness. I would have done the right thing before God and had a testimony before the angels.

Praying in the opposite spirit has the advantage of gradually lifting us out of the 'reactive life' where we let other people 'press our buttons' and make us react. Over time we learn to handle things better, to pause and pray, to be steady in our inner selves. This pays big dividends both personally and professionally because no one wants to be around a person who is easily agitated but everyone enjoys someone who is calm, professional and loving.

You may not be able to stop yourself getting angry, but there is no need to stay angry!

Praying in the opposite spirit vents all the poisonous destructive anger and lets God deal with it. Tell your problem to God and push through until you know you are in the right place spiritually once more. We see this often in the Psalms where King David brings some agonizing conflict with his enemies before the throne of God:

Psalms 25:15-22 MKJV *My eyes are ever toward Jehovah; for He shall pluck my feet out of the net. (16) Turn to me, and have mercy on me, for I am wasted and afflicted. (17) The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. (18) Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins. (19) Look on my enemies; for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred. (20) Keep my soul, and deliver me; let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You. (21) Let purity and uprightness keep me; for I wait on You. (22) Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.*

Now we need to remember that King David had enormous power and could have simply had his political enemies killed just as many kings of that time would easily have done without a second thought. But David chose God's way and did NOT take his own personal, spiteful revenge. These psalms indicate that David was restraining his anger and his political and judicial power and was leaving the matter with the Lord.

Just a final note, praying in the opposite spirit does not apply if your life or the life of your children is in danger. You should not stay in an abusive or violent situation. There is an appropriate time to go to the police and to protect yourself and your family. I am not encouraging staying in hopeless and dangerous situations. What I am encouraging is reacting to life's provocations in a Christ-like manner.

72: Ministering Grace In The Spirit

One of the key questions of spiritual ministry is: How can we minister grace to the hurting? Hope to the hopeless? And salvation to the lost? How can the overflow of our Christian lives touch hearts and minds? Paul tells the Colossians how to teach and admonish each other:

Colossians 3:16-17 ISV *Let the word of Christ dwell in you with all richness and wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and singing to God with thankfulness in your hearts. (17) And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

This is clearly a joyous and thankful process, full of singing and melody. The teaching and admonishing is done through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs and singing to God with thankfulness! As the word of Christ dwells richly it produces an abundance of praise and praise glorifies God and instructs and encourages the saints!

The gracious lifestyle is Christ-centered, joyful, thankful and praise-filled! Everything is done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ giving thanks to God the Father. Grace overflows from gratitude. I once read a book entitled "Gratitude – The Heart of Prayer" indeed as creatures we should have great gratitude to our Creator, and as sons of God we should be filled with gratitude to our Heavenly Father, and as the redeemed we should be filled with gratitude toward our Redeemer!

Once we are grounded in gratitude and have our feet shod with the gospel of peace then we can move forward into the ministry of grace!! (After all, how can an unhappy grumbling unthankful Christian radiate faith?)

Some disciplines which are a great help include:

- a) Reading large chunks of Scripture in a systematic fashion and meditating on them.
- b) Listening to worship music that has a definite anointing on it.
- c) Expressing your praise in personal times of worship e.g. by speaking in tongues
- d) Meditating on the Names of God and the attributes of God and the promises of God
- e) Thanking God for His work in your life and for every answered prayer
- f) Joining a small group or prayer group where you actively edify each other

You can 'mix and match' these as you choose and even do several simultaneously, for instance listening to praise music while you read the Scriptures in a small prayer group.

As you do these things you will set your mind on the Spirit and reap life and peace (Romans 8:4-6) and it is from this life and peace that you can minister to others (far too much ministry comes from deadness of spirit, striving and turmoil). We have to invest TIME – big chunks of TIME if we are to have this grace-filled overflow of a thankful spirit. Two or three brief quiet times a week simply will not do. The world is too much around us for that!

You have to carve out the time!! Take the time you spend on TV, novels, magazines, daydreaming, materialistic window shopping, coveting, fretting and other such nonsense and turn it into time for God! By all means spend time with your family or time in the garden or time exercising. Do good constructive things. Just delete the 'junk' that nibbles away our days and use that time for God.

Figure out how to cultivate a praise-filled life. Have praise music in the car or on your MP3 player as you exercise. Give real THANKS at meal times. Make a habit of thanking God at the beginning and end of each day. Bless other people. Write encouraging emails. Plant the positive deep down into your life.

The tone of your ministry is 90% of your ministry. Content is quickly forgotten unless it is delivered in love. No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care. Think over the pastors who have impressed you and ministered deeply to you. Sure their messages were important but their attitude toward God and toward you probably is the dominant thing you remember e.g. "Pastor Bill always had a kind word for the hurting..."

The tone of your ministry is set in the prayer closet. Those who hunger and thirst after God will be filled and as they are filled they will be a blessing to others also.

The thankful lifestyle is a decision we make over and over again. The thankful person and the grumbler can go to the same church, hear the same sermons and have much the same income and life circumstances but they are worlds apart in their levels of faith! The grumbler looks intently for the flaws in his or her life then blames God for them or says 'how can I be thankful when X is happening'. They always have a reason or an excuse for being negative. The faith-filled person is like Habakkuk who praised God even when 'the fig tree did not blossom'. Even when life is dull and ordinary or difficult and painful we can always find some reason to praise God (salvation, His nature, the Scriptures).

Once we are filled with the Spirit and joy and thanksgiving and are making melody in our hearts to the Lord, then we will have the correct spiritual tone in our lives and we can think about the issue of the actual content we will impart when we minister in grace:

The Scriptures are our equipping:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ISV *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, (17) so that the man of God may be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

The rivers of living water that will flow from our inmost being, consist of the Spirit joyfully applying the Word to the lives of those who need to hear it. The Spirit without the Word is mute, the Word without the Spirit is life-less. But combined they are gracious, powerful and wonderful!

The ministry of grace takes a Spirit-filled person, who is thoroughly equipped with the Word, and puts them alongside those who are needy. God may give a word of knowledge or wisdom or just enable the person to act wisely and graciously to touch lives in ways that fill them with peace.

Let's aim to bring God's peace to human hearts. Let's slow down and be joyful and come alongside people as agents of timely and much-needed grace. To be so busy that we are

prayer-less, grumpy and joyless is to destroy our ministry. As the old hymn says "Take time to be holy".

TAKE TIME TO BE HOLY

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

1. Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.
2. Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;
And run not before Him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.
3. Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

73: Jesus And Our Suffering

Suffering is one of the most difficult theological questions and one of the most relevant pastoral issues. Much of this apparent difficulty stems from the fact that suffering is often perceived as just one issue, when in fact it has many different aspects. Like physical pain, suffering is generally a symptom of something else. Just as dizziness can have many different causes (such as a knock on the head, a tumor, low blood pressure etc.) so our suffering has many aspects and causes. In the following article I shall look at the nine broad categories of suffering in the New Testament and briefly comment on how Jesus meets us in each of them:

1. Human suffering such as illness or demon possession which is always regarded as negative and is often healed by Jesus 1 John 3:8, John 10:10, Matthew 4:23-24, 8:16,17; 9:20,21,22,35; 12:15, 17:14-17, Mark 3:10,11; Luke 4:40, 5:15, 6:17-19, 13:1-5, James 5:13-18

Jesus never told someone to be patient with their illness and never prayed "Father, if it be Thy will heal such-and-so". Jesus healed all who came to Him - of all their diseases (Matthew 4:23, 8:16). Neither does Jesus leave anyone demon-possessed. Jesus came to reverse the Fall and to undo the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8) and to bring life abundantly where it has been stolen from people by Satan (John 10:10). Jesus is filled with compassion and like any compassionate person He longs to alleviate the common burdens and sufferings of mankind in response to faith.

2. Suffering as a result of sinful behavior Romans 1:21-32, 2:8,9; 1 Corinthians 10:6-10,11-28-30, James 5:13-16, 1 Peter 4:15

Some suffering is a direct result of sinful behavior. The drunk and disorderly behavior of the Corinthians during Communion meant that many were sick and some even died as a result of their sin (1 Corinthians 11:28-30). The apostle Peter tells us that Christians are to suffer righteously not as murderers or thieves. Jesus calls us to repent and be healed.

3. Suffering as a result of persecution, which is to be avoided or endured, even rejoiced in! Jesus warns his disciples about it but promises reward for, not relief from such suffering. Matthew 5:10-12,44; 10:21-23, 23:34, Mark 10:30, John 5:16, 15:20, Acts 8:1, 9:4, 16 Romans 8:35-39, 1 Corinthians 4:12, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Galatians 4:29, 2 Thessalonians 1:4,5; 2 Timothy 3:11,12; Hebrews 10:32-35, 13:12, James 5:10, 1 Peter 3:14-17, 1 Peter 4:12-19, Revelation 2:10

This is just a small sample of the NT verses about persecution and suffering! Persecution is seen as inevitable in a world governed by hostile powers and principalities (2 Timothy 3:11,12) until Satan is defeated by Christ's return. At that point believers will be rewarded a hundred – fold and reign with Christ during the Millennium.

Christ promises us reward for such endurance, but not relief from such suffering. But if we can avoid it we should do so e.g. 'flee to the mountains'. Jesus often avoided confrontation (Matthew

12:14,15; John 11:53,54) and it is wise for us to do so also. However, when it cannot be avoided such suffering, for righteousness sake, is our glory. Jesus strengthens, consoles and rewards.

4. Redemptive suffering such as the Cross which is gone through on behalf of others. This is done by Jesus alone on the Cross. To some (much lesser) extent we suffer with Christ when we proclaim Him and are persecuted.

Matthew 16:21, 17:12; Mark 8:31; Luke 17:25, 24:26; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 2:9,10,18; Hebrews 12:3; 1 Peter 3:18; 2 Timothy 2:10

Jesus suffered and died for our salvation. This was 'once for all time' suffering and since then there has no longer been any sacrifice for sin. This suffering was totally unique and deeply spiritual in nature and was confined to Christ. Jesus suffered on the cross so that we might not suffer in Hell. However, we suffer like this to a limited extent in ministry when we consciously endure suffering for those who are yet to be saved - as Paul said: "I endure all things for the sake of the elect". (2 Timothy 2:10)

5. Suffering as a result of the disciple's cross, death to sin & the world. This kind of suffering tests our obedience and renunciation and disciplines us to righteousness and is to be accepted. We don't have any choice about it, we are 'appointed' to such suffering (1 Thessalonians 3:3)

Matthew 10:32-42, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Luke 9:22-26, Acts 14:22, Romans 5:3-5, 8:17-18, 2 Corinthians 4:17,18, 1 Thessalonians 3:3,4; Philippians 1:29-30, 1 Timothy 4:10, 2 Timothy 1:8, 3:10-12, 4:5; Hebrews 5:8,9; 11:25, 12:3-13, 1 Peter 2:18-23; 1 Peter 4:1-2, 5:8-10,

This is the suffering of the disciplined sanctified Christian life. It may overlap to some extent with persecution. However, even if we are not being persecuted God will still 'discipline us as sons'. This seems sorrowful for the moment but is ultimately for our good (Hebrews 12:3-13). We may have to renounce the world, and break some inappropriate associations with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). While we are in the flesh and in need of sanctification such suffering is inevitable and we are appointed to it (1 Thessalonians 3:3). It results in the perfection of our character (Romans 5:3-5) and it is through many tribulations that we enter the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22) and get to share Christ's glory (Romans 8:17-18). We are to take up the cross of the disciple daily (Matthew 10:32-42, Mark 8:34-37, Luke 9:23-25) and to accept self-denial as normal for the Christian life. Jesus is our sanctifier and High Priest who has been tempted in every way as we have and who understands our infirmities and who gives us grace and help in time of need (Hebrews 4:12-16).

6. Empathetic suffering as part of Christ's body the Church. As Christ's body suffers we suffer. Romans 12:15, 1 Corinthians 12:26, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24, Hebrews 13:3, James 2:16, 1 Peter 3:8, 1 John 3:16-18

We are not to be self-centered, but rather we are to have generous practical compassion toward each other (1 John 3:16-18, James 2:16) which means that as one part of the body suffers, all suffer with it and when one part of the body rejoices all rejoice with it (Romans 12:15, 1 Corinthians 12:26). We are to have a special burden for our brothers and sisters who are enduring persecution (Hebrews 13:3). Christ suffers as His body suffers ("Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?").

7. End-Time suffering of (some?) Christians – accompanying the Great

Tribulation. Matthew 24:9,10,14-22,29-31 Mark 13:9,10,13-20,24-27; Luke 21:12-19, Revelation 7:14-17, 12:12,13, 13:10, 14:12,13, 17:14

This is the wrath of Satan who has been cast down to earth, who attacks the Church, especially Christian Jews (Revelation 12:12,13), and is not the wrath of God. The gospel verses above tell us that they will be betrayed and killed during a time of great apostasy and persecution. Revelation tells us that the end-time saints will need great patience during the time of the Antichrist as they refuse to accept the mark of the Beast (Revelation 14:12,13) and that many will be killed (Revelation 13:10) by beheading (Revelation 20:4). Those who refuse the mark are considered victorious (Revelation 15:2) and are greatly rewarded (Revelation 14:13) and will reign and rule with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). Jesus greatly rewards those who endure this Tribulation.

8. End-Time suffering of non-Christians due to the final Wrath of God. The wrath of the Lamb. Revelation 6:16,17, 8:1-13, 9:1-21, 16:1-21

Revelation tells a story of terrible plagues, and judgments ending at the final battle of Armageddon. These final plagues are the poured out wrath of God on those who worship the Beast and his image and who take the mark of the Beast. These are agonizing judgments and are the 'wrath of the Lamb' (Revelation 6:16,17). Here Jesus is the punisher of the defiantly and brazenly wicked and leads His army to defeat them.

9. The final existential suffering of the Lost in Hell – those who reject Christ

Isaiah 66:24, Matthew 3:12, 25:41,46; Mark 9:42-48, Luke 16:22-26, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Revelation 14:9-11, 20:10,15; 21:8

Those who totally reject Christ are in turn rejected by the Father and cast out from the presence of God (2 Thessalonians 1:9) into a place of everlasting punishment (Revelation 14:9-11, 20:10,15, 21:8) where their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched (Matthew 3:12, Mark 9:42-48, Luke 16:22-26) and where they are an everlasting disgrace (Isaiah 66:24). However the righteous will go into everlasting life (Matthew 25:41, 46). Jesus did not come into the world to judge the world but to save it, but those who refused to believe Him, and who despised Him and His words, will be judged by His words on the Last Day (John 12:44-50). The best way to avoid this suffering is to believe in Him and find everlasting life (John 3:16-18).

Some Final Comments

The obvious question is how do we know which category of suffering applies to us? Since we are not in the Tribulation or Hell or the final End Times then categories 7,8 and 9 are not present punishments. It is also fairly easy to know when we are suffering as a result of direct malicious persecution or when we are suffering for the gospel or suffering in sympathy with Christ's body the Church. That leaves three categories of suffering – suffering as a result of being in a fallen world, suffering as a result of sin and suffering as a disciple of Christ. This is where the epistle of James is a big help:

James 5:13-16 MKJV *Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing psalms. (14) Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (15) And the prayer of faith will*

cure the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. And if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him. (16) Confess faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous one avails much.

James tells us that sickness should be healed yet that it may require repentance and forgiveness (confess your sins to one another so that you may be healed). Sickness can result from sin (1 Corinthians 11:28-30) or from being part of a fallen world (John 9:1,2) but either way God wants to heal it and has provided confession and forgiveness as a means of healing when the sickness is due to sin. This does not just apply to physical sickness but to emotional distress and forms of painful distress in life. God wants these healed and fixed and wants us to pray (is anyone afflicted, let him pray...) to seek help from the Church and to find forgiveness, repentance and healing. This helps us to understand categories 1 & 2 above.

The final difficult to understand category is the disciples cross. This is the suffering of renunciation, purification, discipline and holiness and its central concept is self-denial unto godliness. It is often described in athletic terms such as running the race, wrestling, enduring, and exercising yourself unto godliness. The Greek verbs are generally very strong and intense. It is a terrible struggle because you are wrestling with your own sinful nature and its desires and allegiances. Sickness is never described as a 'cross' in the New Testament. Physical sickness may come if we refuse to repent or if we refuse to exercise ourselves to godliness (in the spiritual sense) but illness is not the exercise itself. The cross is not bearing sickness (which many sinners do quite well) but bearing Christ. It is the decisive break between the 'old life' and the 'new life' involving self-denial and death to self (Mark 8:34-37, Luke 9:22-26, Romans 6:6, Gal 2:20, 5:24, 6:14).

Mark 8:34-37 MKJV *And calling near the crowd with His disciples, He said to them, Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. (35) For whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, he shall save it. (36) For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (37) Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Comfortable Christianity runs from this needed disciplinary suffering into a thousand snares planted by the Devil! We have to let God deal with us and train us and grow us. And we are to take up the Cross and the challenge of consecration unto God. As we overcome the trials of our faith we shall come forth as gold!

Understanding the various kinds of suffering can help us to encourage others and to stand firm in the faith ourselves. We are not to be those who seek comfort at every turn, but rather those who call on God for strength and who find Him adequate in every circumstance of life.

74: Why Isn't Everyone Healed?

Yesterday's post on suffering got a response raising the 'thorn in the flesh' issue and by implication the question: 'Why isn't everyone healed'

The Thorn In The Flesh

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 LITV .. (7) *And by the superabundance of the revelations, that I not be made arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan, that he might buffet me, that I not be made haughty. (8) Beyond this I entreated the Lord three times, that it depart from me. (9) And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness. Therefore, I will rather gladly boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may overshadow me. (10) Because of this, I am pleased in weaknesses, in insults, in dire needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for the sake of Christ. For when I may be weak, then I am powerful.*

a) The context is one where Paul's revelations are contrasted with the 'revelations' of the false apostles; this theme runs throughout 2 Corinthians and is brought to a peak in the previous chapter (2 Corinthians 11). Just before our 'thorn in the flesh' passage Paul details his sufferings and struggles and persecutions on behalf of the gospel. He concludes chapter 11 by saying that he boasted in those weaknesses (persecutions)

b) The stated reason for the thorn in the flesh being given to Paul was because of the 'super-abundance' of the revelations given to him, in order to keep Paul from being exalted. This is not something I (or most Christians) could claim about our illnesses. We are not apostles and we do not have a 'super-abundance' of revelations from the Third Heaven.

c) The phrase 'thorn in the flesh' is a Greek idiom like our expression 'a right pain in the neck' - and it refers to people, not to illnesses. The Bible refers to people who are opponents of God's people and the gospel as 'thorns' in the following verses: Numbers 33:55, Joshua 23:13, Judges 2:3, Psalms 118:12, Ezekiel 2:6, also unjust judges are called thorns in Micah 7:4 the wicked are called thorns in 2 Samuel 23:6 as apostate Israel at its peak of wickedness in Isaiah 33:10-14

d) The 'thorn in the flesh' is described as a messenger ("angelos") of Satan, literally 'an angel of Satan'. Of the 188 uses of the Greek word "angelos" in the Bible, 181 refer to angels and seven to messengers. In all these cases "angelos" refers to "beings" (human or divine) and not to objects or diseases. We cannot change the meaning of the word on this one occasion. The "angelos" may have been a high level demonic opponent or a human being who was driven by Satan to oppose Paul at every turn (e.g. Alexander the coppersmith – 2 Timothy 4:14).

e) The result of the 'thorn in the flesh' is not sickness but 'buffeting' (2 Corinthians 12:7) the word means 'to hit with the fist' and indicates physical beatings, trouble or harassment– that is physical blows of some sort. The outcomes include: *weaknesses, in insults, in dire needs, in persecutions, in distresses*. It accords well with Paul's imprisonments, beatings, stonings and so forth because of trouble stirred up by his various opponents.

f) Paul asks for 'removal' and not for healing. We ask for trials and circumstances to be removed and illnesses to be healed. Paul is asking for a change in circumstances of some sort. The word

remove is 'aposte' (from which we get 'apostate' and it means 'one who turns away'. Paul is asking God to make the person turn away from harassing him. It is 3rd person singular active subjunctive 'that he might be removed from me'.

g) The word for weakness in 2 Corinthians 12 is used just a few verses earlier (2 Corinthians 11:30) to summarize all of Paul's various trials in ministry (2 Corinthians 11:23-33) – and all of the weaknesses Paul lists are beatings, persecutions and narrow escapes from danger. In fact, if 2 Corinthians 11:23 – 12:10 is considered as one passage / theme then it makes a whole lot more sense (we find the same themes of boasting, weakness and persecution in these adjacent verses). Also the particular lexical form of the word for weakness used in 2 Cor. 11:30, 12:9 and 12:10 is the same: “astheneiais” and this tends to mean 'vulnerability' or 'stumbling' rather than actual physical sickness. Sickness is generally rendered by the alternative form “asthenes” .

h) The reason for the 'thorn' is to keep Paul humble and useful for God. Paul was by nature ambitious and competitive. His excelling beyond his countrymen (Galatians 1) and his frequent athletic and military metaphors are evidence of this. Paul's humility would be the opposite of the swelling boastfulness of the false prophets described in the previous chapter (2 Corinthians 11). God was not allowing Paul to be an 'empire-builder' but was keeping him lowly and humble where he would be spiritually safe. The constant hindrances and frustrations and harassment kept Paul from expanding and thus getting too proud.

h) The weakness did not hinder God's power but became an avenue for grace to flow to many. Paul was going to have a powerful ministry despite the persecutions – just not a vainglorious one in the human sense. How is God's power perfected? This is key. If God's power was perfected by people being ill then Jesus should not have healed anyone. But He did heal people, and if God's will is done on earth as it is in Heaven then none would be sick (because there are none sick in Heaven). Jesus did heal illness but He did not stop persecution, nor did He promise His disciples an easy path through such persecution. God's power is perfected in us when we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44-48).

So Paul's thorn in the flesh was a demonically inspired opponent of the gospel who arranged persecutions and hindrances at every turn and kept Paul from having a ministry that was vainglorious in the human sense but which was unable to prevent the power of God working through Paul for the salvation of many.

So Then Why Isn't Everyone Healed?

Illness, especially chronic unhealed illness is a terrible thing that deserves compassion and relief. Any loving Heavenly Father would want His children healed. So why doesn't it happen? First of all, we have to realize that healing in the name of Jesus is bitterly opposed by Satan because it brings so much glory to God. Healing is a spiritual battle at every turn which may require prayer and fasting (as in the case of the epileptic boy).

The thing to remember is that God does want you to be healed. God is a loving Father who wants His will done on earth as it is in heaven – and in Heaven no one is sick. Jesus healed all who came to Him, of all their diseases. Do not think that God might want you to suffer in sickness so that you can be humbled.

God wants everyone saved from sin, delivered from demons, healed of their sicknesses and living holy and righteous lives in Christ as they declare forth the love of God. But we don't see that, because of the unholy Satanic opposition to every manifestation of faith and godliness. Just as your salvation was opposed and your sanctification is opposed and your deliverance is opposed so your healing is opposed.

Healing occurs best under an 'open Heaven' that is during revival such as the Jerusalem revival (Acts 2-5), the Samaritan revival (Acts 8) and the revival at Ephesus (Acts 19). Healing occurs least in an atmosphere of unbelief such as Jesus found at Nazareth (Matthew 13:58, Mark 6:5,6).

The secular humanist rationalist mindset of much of Western culture means that we struggle to have faith for healing. In other cultures, healing is more common because it is easier for them to believe.

We also need to understand that the good things of God are far from automatic. God wills many things that do not happen on earth, or which happen far too infrequently. The spiritual, social and moral conditions of this world bear enough testimony to that! God's promises are only fulfilled through faith: **Luke 1:45 ASV** *And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a fulfillment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord.*

In my experience the seven things that most hinder healing are:

- 1) Lack of faith particularly in the ones praying e.g. the ministers/elders involved
- 2) Abiding sin, unforgiveness, resentments, rage and bitterness, grieving the Spirit
- 3) Hindering spirits, spiritual oppression and darkness, keeping idols, curses etc.
- 4) Avoiding disappointment by not really praying or not investing much in praying
- 5) A few people identify with their sickness and don't want to be healed
- 6) Lack of spiritual authority. The battle is not engaged fiercely enough or long enough. Command prayer is not used.
- 7) Lack of deep compassion. Healing flows when spiritual compassion flows in power.

By correcting these seven things (as much as we can) we will see more healing. We will probably not see 100% healing but we will see more healing. And that will be a good thing. See 18 reasons for unanswered prayer: www.globalchristians.org/articles/unansw1.htm

75: How To Fulfill Your Spiritual Ministry And Destiny

God has spoken to you about a great and wonderful spiritual ministry – now how do you bring it to birth? The following verse was spoken by Elizabeth to her cousin Mary:

Luke 1:45 ASV *And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a fulfillment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord.*

We are pregnant with things from God. God has spoken to us about them and we groan within and long to bring them to birth. But they seem impossible. We say “How can these things be?”

The angel's pronouncement to Mary ends with a verse that if translated literally from the Greek would read: **Luke 1:37 ASV** *For no (rhema) word from God shall be void of power.* But which is generally rendered: **Luke 1:37 MKJV** *For with God nothing shall be impossible.*

Pulling these diverse threads together we find that Mary's faith led to a fulfillment of the things that were spoken to her by the Lord, even though they were humanly impossible at the time, because nothing is impossible with God and every word spoken by God has power.

Every worthwhile spiritual ministry flows from something which the Lord speaks into the inner world of our spirit and which, over time, becomes a reality in the outer world. Ministry is first created inside us through our faith agreement with the plans and purposes of God and our trust in His ability to bring those things to pass.

Our ministry will be 'birthed' through enduring faith alone. First the promise of the impossible, then the exercise of faith in the promise, then the testing of that faith, then the fulfillment of the promise. You cannot create a true spiritual ministry through the flesh or through human organization alone. In such cases you just end up with Ishmael instead of Isaac.

The faith that finds fulfillment is undeterred. Like Paul it presses on relentlessly toward the goal. We have to stop stumbling over difficulties and being put off by 'impossibilities' such as finances. The difficulties and impossibilities are God's business. Our business is to believe what He has spoken to us.

It took Abraham twenty-five years to see the birth of Isaac. Abraham believed and was not stumbled by the long delay and the advanced age of his body and of Sarah's body, and it was this unwavering faith that brought the promise to fulfillment!

Romans 4:19-22 MKJV *And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body already dead (being about a hundred years old) or the deadening of Sarah's womb. (20) He did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, (21) and being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was also able to perform. (22) And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.*

Verse 21 is a great spiritual principle: *being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was also able to perform.*

When God speaks a great promise into your heart, when you know for certain that you are called to do something impossible, then believe in the Lord! Know that even if it takes 25 years, that it will come to birth! For what God has promised He is also able to perform.

God does not promise you things then abandon you. Nor does He promise you things and make you do them all on your own. God looks for your faith and when your faith rises up then He will do the miracle. Then you will see the fulfillment of all that the Lord has spoken to you about!

It is our continued belief that unlocks the promises of God. If we 'believe' one day then don't believe the next because 'the feeling' isn't there then we will not behold the works of God. Or if we believe in a moment of excitement but give up as soon as it gets tough, then we will not reap. Or if we believe in the bible study but forget as soon as we are at work or at home and the cares of this world choke our faith and kill our dream then we will be fruitless. We must take that thing spoken by God and plant it deep in our hearts like Mary did and believe it with a humble and gracious attitude:

Luke 1:38 MKJV *And Mary said, Behold the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.*

Fulfillment comes through faith - tough, gritty faith that marches on through all the years and all the difficulties. When we look at the 'heroes of faith' in Hebrews 11 we find a list of people who made sacrifices for their dream - from Abraham leaving his family behind to Moses refusing to be called a son of Pharaoh.

Faith is nearly always associated with things such as risk and endurance. Jericho's walls did not fall down until they had been encircled for seven days and until the risk of obedience to a seemingly strange command was taken. David had to step right up to the fierce giant Goliath. Gideon had to fight the vast armies of the Midianites with only 300 men. Faith is closer to courage than it is to magic!

Faith is being an entrepreneur with only promises as your capital and only God as your banker. But you CAN bank on the promises of God! They are as real and certain as the ground under your feet.

When you have faith of any kind you are moved to take action. If you believe that one day you will be a great golfer, then you will go out and play lots of golf. If you believe that one day you will be a great evangelist, you start preaching. And when Abraham heard God's call about the land, he moved from Ur of the Chaldees to a land he did not know.

As Abraham took action and journeyed into the promised land his promises came true. As we take faith-based action, that which God has spoken into our spirit will come true. As you do your small part, God does His much greater part.

There is always a moment of consent where we say: *Behold the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.* Perplexed, yet agreeing with the Presence of Almighty God. Trusting, though we do not yet understand.

Perhaps there is no greater example of this than Abraham's prompt obedience when he was told to go and sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering at the place that God would show him. Nothing

about this made sense, and much of it contradicted what he knew about God's promises and character, yet Abraham knew it was God speaking, so he obeyed.

Faith consents to the impossible, the unthinkable and the perplexing. Faith is content to be confused. What young virgin, full of faith and purity, wants to be pregnant out of wedlock? What happened to Mary was confusing and difficult to say the least. She had to go and stay with her cousin Elizabeth for a while.

God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. And the transforming voice of God might come to you from the midst of the most difficult circumstances that you have ever faced.

Why do so many ministries fail and so many God-given dreams never succeed? Some are destroyed by the devil, or by sin, or by the apathy of men. But quite a number fail because there is a lack of enduring faith. For every dream there is nearly always a time of testing. A time of pain, confusion and perplexity when finances dry up and complications arise. It is when the ministry seems 'dead' that the resurrection comes!

The blessing for believing is a fulfillment of the promises of God. But that belief might just take every ounce of spiritual fiber that you have! I am not talking about academic believing in the propositions of theology. Rather I am talking about believing God for the actual real tangible fulfillment of a rhema-word promise in your life. Destiny is not handed to us on a silver platter. It comes through much testing and much trusting in the promises of God.

Review Questions

1. What is spiritual ministry? How does it differ from human organization?
2. How does spiritual ministry enable us to do 'greater works'?
3. What impact do fear and faith have upon spiritual ministry?
4. What are the initiatives of Heaven?
5. How did the initiatives of Heaven guide the ministry of Jesus and the apostles?
6. How do the initiatives of heaven help us to be in the right place, with the right people, doing the right thing, at the right time, and getting the right results?
7. How are the initiatives of Heaven related to other means of knowing God's will?
8. How are good works essential to the faith-filled Christian life?

9. What are the rivers of living water and how can they flow from our inmost being?

10. How does God graciously pour out His Spirit in response to our faith?

11. How does faith lead us into the ministry of the impossible?

12. In what way/s is Christ the essence of spiritual ministry?

13. What is the priority and the importance of the ministry of the Word?

14. Why is good preaching from the Word always focused on Jesus?

15. How do the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit work together?

16. How can we connect the Word with the hearts and minds of the hearers?

17. Why is diligent study an important part of the ministry of the Word?

18. How can we study to know Christ and to present Him clearly to human hearts and minds?

19. How does the ministry of prayer focus on making God's heavenly will manifested locally here on earth?

20. Write down at least six of the 28 things that God wants us to pray for (see appendix)

21. How can we wrestle against powers and principalities in prayer?

22. What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?

23. When, and how, can we pray for our heart's desires?

24. How is our prayer life changed when we pray with eternity in view?

25. How did Jesus and the apostles pray for healing?

26. What are some of the keys involved in praying for healing?

27. How are we to pray when we are persecuted or facing difficulties?

28. What is the role of praise, worship and thanksgiving in spiritual ministry?

29. How are our joy and our ministry related?

30. List the nine kinds of suffering that are found in the New Testament.

31. What is the thorn in the flesh?

32. Why is healing such a difficult challenge? Why aren't some people healed?

28 Things That God Wants You To Pray For!

How can we fulfill our spiritual ministry and destiny?

A word search of the New Testament for prayer terms such as “pray, prayed, prayers, intercede, intercession, supplication, ask, asked, etc.” unearthed the following 28 topics that God is asking us to pray for:

- 1) Our enemies and those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44)
- 2) God's honor, God's will and God's Kingdom (Matthew 6:9-10, 33)
- 3) Daily bread, provision (Matthew 6:11, Luke 11:3, 3John 1:2)
- 4) Forgiveness of sin (Matthew 6:12, 1 John 1:9) including the sins of others (Luke 23:34, 1 John 5:16)
- 5) Escape from hard testing, affliction and temptation (Matthew 6:13, 24:20, 26:41 James 5:13)
- 6) The blessing of little children (Matthew 19:13)
- 7) Healing (James 5:14-16, Acts 9:40, 28:18)
- 8) Deliverance from evil spirits (Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29)
- 9) Acts of power that will glorify God (James 5:16-18)
- 10) Wisdom (James 1:5-8)
- 11) For Christians to be filled with God's love (John 17:26, Ephesians 3:14-21)
- 12) For believers to receive spiritual strength in the inner man (Ephesians 3:14-21, Colossians 1:9-12)
- 13) Spiritual understanding , revelation, knowledge of Christ (Ephesians 1:15-20, Philippians 1:9-11)
- 14) Knowledge of the will of God (Colossians 1:9-11, Philemon 1:4-6)
- 15) Impartation of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13, Acts 8:15, 9:17) and spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:13)
- 16) The sanctification of believers (John 17:17-19)
- 17) That believers will 'do no evil' (2 Corinthians 13:7)

- 18) The perfection of believers (2 Corinthians 13:9, Colossians 4:12)
- 19) Fulfillment of the spiritual calling on a Church, with power (2 Thessalonians 1:11,12)
- 20) The unity of believers (John 17:20-23)
- 21) Opportunities for gospel ministry (Romans 1:10, Colossians 4:2-4, 2 Thessalonians 3:1)
- 22) Boldness in ministry (Acts 4:24-31, Ephesians 6:19)
- 23) Laborers for the Harvest (Matthew 9:38, Luke 10:2)
- 24) The selection of leaders to be sent out (Luke 6:12,13; Acts 13:1-4, 14:23)
- 25) Deliverance of God's servants from danger (Acts 12:5, Romans 15:30,31; 2 Thessalonians 3:2)
- 26) The salvation of certain ethnic groups – such as the Jews (Romans 10:1)
- 27) The salvation of leaders and those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-4)
- 28) What we need in order to glorify the Lord: Any 'good thing' / in Jesus' Name / in accordance with God's will (Matthew 7:11, 21:21,22; Mark 11:24, John 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24, 1 John 3:22, 5:14,15)

All of the above prayer points involve us cooperating with God's divine agenda. For instance, God wants laborers in the harvest so the nations can be won to Christ and we are to pray for it. And God wants Christians to grow in sanctification and knowledge of His will – and we are to pray for it. It seems that when God wants something done on earth He asks His saints to go to prayer!

It is very important that we pray for the right things. Many people receive nothing from the Lord because they are praying for their own lusts and desires (James 4:3) or out of anger and wrath (1 Timothy 2:8) or out of doubt and unbelief (James 1:5-8).

However, if we pray for righteous things then God is swift to answer, for the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16, 1 Peter 3:12).

The 'anything you ask' passages were mostly given by Jesus to those involved in doing His will (such as the 11 apostles at the Last Supper after Judas had left). Once we are doing God's will the Heavens are opened to us. Our prayer life will take off once God's agenda becomes our agenda. Jesus has promised us that if we seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness then 'all these things' will be added unto us (Matthew 6:33).

Focus your prayer life on the 28 things that God most wants prayed for! Stop praying for parking spaces and start praying for nations, for your pastor, for your church and for the progress of the gospel. This will both change you for the better and also change the world for good – because God answers prayer.

